United Nations S/PV.7769

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7769th meeting
Tuesday, 13 September 2016, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Taula	(New Zealand)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Xu Zhongsheng
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Ms. Guéguen-Mohsen
	Japan	Mr. Akahori
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Arcia Vivas

Agenda

The situation in Libya

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16-28521 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Libya

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Libya to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Martin Kobler, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Martin Kobler, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, and Ambassador Ramlan Bin Ibrahim, Permanent Representative of Malaysia, in his capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1970 (2011) concerning Libya.

I now give the floor to Mr. Kobler.

Mr. Kobler (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to wish a very joyous and blessed Eid Al-Adha to all those Muslims, and in particular to all Libyans. It is a day for reconciliation — a day to reunite in peace.

(*spoke in English*)

I would also like to congratulate New Zealand on presiding over the Security Council this month.

Since my last briefing to the Council (see S/PV.7706), the paradox of Libya has become more apparent. The country has a tremendous potential, immense natural resources and a young population eager to reshape its future. And yet, instead of making use of all these blessings, long lines of Libyan men and women wait in the heat in front of banks to withdraw their daily limit of 200 dinars — about $40 — to cover the rising costs of basic necessities.

Faced with few prospects for earning a livelihood, rampant insecurity and endemic corruption, the temptation for the young to leave the country or join armed groups can be overwhelming. This is not a foundation on which to build a stable country. It is high time that the Libyans join forces to urgently address the burning political, security and economic problems of Libya.

Given the military events of recent days I would like to briefly update the Council along the following four points: first, the worrying security situation; secondly, the political momentum created by the recent decision of the House of Representatives; thirdly, the need for national reconciliation; and fourthly, the failing economy.

With respect to the seed situation, on the eve of Eid Al-Adha, the fragile peace in Libya's oil crescent suffered a fierce blow when units of the Libyan National Army, under the command of General Khalifa Haftar, attacked the oil terminals and ports in the oil crescent area. This area was under the control of forces loyal to the Presidency Council. I was concerned that this might happen. This development will further hinder oil exports, deprive Libya of its only source of income, and increase the division of the country. This has to stop. Libyan natural resources belong to all Libyans. They must be protected and exported legally under the authority of the Presidency Council. Otherwise, Libya's citizens will pay the price.

I therefore called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and urged all parties to avoid inflicting any damage to the oil facilities. I also urged respect for resolution 2259 (2015), which recognizes the Presidency Council and the Government of National Accord as the sole executive authority of Libya. Differences must be resolved through dialogue, not military force. I have many times sought to engage with General Haftar to encourage him to embrace dialogue. However, my repeated attempts have so far been without success.

On a positive note, forces loyal to the Presidency Council made impressive progress towards ousting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) from its last remaining stronghold in Libya, in Sirte. Very soon, ISIS will no longer hold territory in Libya. However, the terrorist threat in Libya and beyond will remain, and will require continued vigilance. I would like to pay tribute to the more than 500 brave Libyans who sacrificed their lives and the 2,500 who were injured in the fight against ISIS in Sirte. But importatly, my thoughts also go to the many thousands who fell while fighting the scourge of terrorism in other parts of Libya, in particular Benghazi.

I also want to thank those who supported the operation to rid Sirte of terrorism at the request of the Presidency Council, particularly the United States for its air support, which without any doubt has saved many lives, striking numerous car bombs before they reached their targets, and strengthened the Presidency Council's ability to defeat ISIS in Sirte. I would also like to thank those Member States that provided medical support, either in their territories or inside Libya. The fight against ISIS is a Libyan-led fight, but the defeat of ISIS in Libya benefits the entire region.

Now civilian and military authority needs to be established in Sirte and security restored. To this end, we convened a meeting with key ministers of the Government of National Accord last week to develop a plan after the liberation of Sirte. Reconstruction efforts in Sirte must be a model case for other places, such as Benghazi. The Council will recall my constant appeals for a reconstruction fund for Benghazi after security has been restored.

Libya remains a launch pad for thousands of migrants. This year alone, in this season, 112,000 migrants reached Italy's shores from Libya. Three thousand migrants drowned in the Mediterranean, and many more thousands died in the desert on their way. This senseless loss of so many human lives is simply unacceptable.

Both the fight against terrorism and the flow of migrants are symptoms of Libya's lack of unified and effective security institutions: institutions to secure Libya's borders, institutions to control the circulation of weapons, and institutions to break the criminal networks that prey on the vulnerable.

The security situation in Tripoli is still very fragile. In this context, I welcome the nomination of the commanders of the Presidential Guard. This is the first step towards bringing the new Libyan security units under the full authority of the Presidency Council.

On 5 August, we convened the first high-level security meeting of more than 50 key Libyan security actors to discuss proposals for improving security in Tripoli and in the country. However, further progress will be possible only if all Libyan security actors from east, west and south agree on a unified chain of command, with the Presidency Council as the Supreme Commander of the Libyan army. This requires the active engagement and commitment of the international community.

Let me now come to my second point: the political developments. The formation of an effective Government of National Accord is critical for the transition period in Libya. After months of political stalemate, the House of Representatives on 22 August decided to reject the current Government of National Accord. Nevertheless, this decision is a new opening for the Presidency Council to solicit the endorsement of a unity Government.

Efforts must now be exerted to ensure that the House of Representatives and the Presidency Council work together towards meeting this important milestone. In this regard, the role of the Libyan Political Dialogue has remained relevant. Since my most recent report to the Council, I have convened the Libyan Political Dialogue twice to create additional political space and leverage so as to forge a way through the political impasse. Although there are differences of opinion on the Libyan Political Agreement, even critics and opponents recognize its framework and its value. It remains the only way forward in Libya's transition. There is no alternative.

Here I would like to thank Member States for their unity and support for the Libyan Political Agreement, in particular their strong support for the Presidency Council. It is, however, vital that this political support also be reflected by practice on the ground by all in Libya and outside. Parallel Libyan institutions not coming under the Government of National Accord shall not be supported; red carpets should not be rolled out for them.

During the most recent meeting of the Libyan Political Dialogue last week, on 5 and 6 September, the following lines were discussed and a political way forward was suggested.

First, the Presidency Council should seize the opportunity created by the return of the two boycotting members to become an effective institution. All members should now agree on a revised list of Government ministers. I welcome the intention of the Presidency Council to consult with the main Libyan stakeholders, and I reiterate my request to reserve 30 per cent of the posts for women.

Secondly, the House of Representatives should meet with all of its members in an atmosphere free of intimidation to discuss the constitutional amendment and the endorsement of the Government of National Accord. I will continue to encourage all members of

the House of Representatives, including the boycotters, to join the sessions.

I also call for the presence of Libyan and international observers during these crucial sessions, let us say from the League of Arab States and others, during these crucial sessions of the House of Representatives.

I urge all political actors to truly show statesmanship, leadership and cohesion for the sake of Libyan men, women and children, who just want to have their lives back.

I come to my third point: the question of national reconciliation. On 31 August, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya kick-started a round of discussions with Libyan and international experts on national reconciliation. This is but the small first step of a process leading towards healing the wounds of the past. We should help the Libyans find in themselves the willingness to forgive and overcome the past, and to build a new future together. No reconciliation will succeed if the next generation does not actively participate. Seventy per cent of the population is under the age of 35, and this key part of society must be given a voice and be able to shape Libya's future. Brain drain is a serious problem for Libya.

One inspiring example of reconciliation I would like to mention is the agreement signed between the representatives of the cities of Misrata and Tawergha on 31 August, two weeks ago. The agreement is the product of months of courageous and determined efforts by the two parties, facilitated by our Human Rights Division, and I want to congratulate all involved. I am happy that after many years, the internally displaced will finally be able to start returning to their homes before the end of the year. This agreement should give hope to all 435,000 internally displaced people in the country.

I come to my last and often neglected point: the economic situation. All our efforts can succeed only if the Libyans address the country's growing economic crisis. Libya is a resource-rich country, but its economy is on the road to collapse. Oil production is at its lowest point ever, with only about 200,000 barrels per day compared with 1.4 million barrels even after the revolution. Government spending on salaries and subsidies is at 93 per cent of its total budget, and 1.6 million out of 6 million Libyans — more than one person per family — are on the payroll of the Central Bank. The country is running a 75 per cent budget deficit.

All this has resulted in the imposition of strict capital controls and a lack of liquidity. Libyans are frustrated that they cannot access their own money and that their currency is rapidly losing its value. The fundamentals of the economy need to be urgently addressed. Libya will not be able to rely for long on its foreign reserves. The war economy must give way to the economy of peace. Oil production must resume, and expenditure must be commensurate with the needs of the country. To do so, it is imperative that the pipelines open, Libyan financial institutions become unified and a national budget be approved.

Libya is at a crossroads. While political space has opened and progress is being made in the fight against terrorism, the political divisions underlying the conflict are deepening. Today more than ever, strong action is needed to convince Libyan stakeholders to build institutions that are open, participatory and able to address the needs of all of its citizens.

Finally, allow me to say thank you to a dear colleague who is leaving the Mission, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ali Al-Za'tari, for his distinguished service as the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Libya. I always appreciated his insightful analysis and his consistent and resolute advocacy for protecting the weak and vulnerable in Libyan society. I wish him the best of luck in facing the extremely difficult challenges as part of his new duties as Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria.

I look forward to the ministerial meeting on Libya to be held on 22 September on the margins of the General Assembly to demonstrate the cohesion and determination of the international community in helping Libyans to consolidate the gains achieved so far, but also to address the burning questions.

The President: I thank Mr. Kobler for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Ibrahim.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): In accordance with paragraph 24 (e) of Security Council resolution 1970 (2011), of 26 February 2011, I have the honour to report to the Security Council on the work of the Committee established pursuant to the same resolution. The report covers the period from 7 June to 14 September 2016. The Committee dealt with a number of issues during the reporting period via the silence procedure, which I will enumerate in chronological order.

On 15 June, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs submitted to the Committee a notification under the arms embargo pursuant to paragraph 13 (b) of resolution 2009 (2011), in relation to which the Committee did not take a negative decision.

On 7 July, the Committee received a letter from the Coordinator of the Panel of Experts on Libya, conveying its contribution to the report requested by resolution 2292 (2016), on the threat posed to Libya and neighbouring countries, including off the coast of Libya, by foreign terrorist fighters. The report reflecting the Panel's input has since been published as document S/2016/627.

The Committee received another letter from the Coordinator of the Panel of Experts on 14 July, proposing updates to the Committee's implementation assistance notice number 3. In the light of the adoption of resolution 2292 (2016), the Committee subsequently, on 18 August, updated that notice, which relates to the reporting of detections of attempted or actual violations of the arms embargo and the disposal of embargoed material.

The Committee received a letter from the Permanent Representative of Libya to the United Nations on 15 July, informing the Committee about the focal point pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 2278 (2016). On 28 July, the Committee acknowledged that information and invited the focal point to brief the Committee on the elements set out in that paragraph.

On 18 August, the Committee received an implementation report pursuant to paragraph 25 of resolution 1970 (2011) from the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations.

On 23 August, the Committee approved a request for the extension of a travel ban exemption for an additional six months. In that connection, let me note that both the implementation report and information on the granted travel ban exemption can be found on the website of the Committee.

Finally, on 29 August, the Committee received a notification under the assets freeze measure, pursuant to paragraph 19 (a) of resolution 1970 (2011), to which it did not object.

The President: I thank Mr. Ibrahim for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.25 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7770

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7770th meeting
Wednesday, 14 September 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. McCully	(New Zealand)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Arcia Vivas

Agenda

The situation in Liberia

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16-28692 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Liberia

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2016/772, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United States of America.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Angola, China, Egypt, France, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2308 (2016).

The meeting rose at 10.10 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7771

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7771st meeting

Wednesday, 14 September 2016, 10.10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. McCully/Mr. Van Bohemen/Mrs. Schwalger	(New Zealand)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Arcia Vivas

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2016/768)

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16-28698 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2016/768)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Sweden and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Her Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

I wish to draw the attention of the members of the Council to document S/2016/768, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: As I look at the situation in Afghanistan today, I see opportunity and hope, but also formidable challenges. The progress made by the Afghan people over the past 15 years provides opportunities for further advances. With opportunity comes hope.

The challenges derive from almost 40 years of war. Despite very real progress, Afghanistan still has a long way to go to meet fully the needs of its people. The upcoming Brussels Conference could provide the time and space for the Afghan Government to move towards stability and self-reliance. The Government should seize this opportunity. In order to meet its challenges, the Government must be able to act effectively. The current precarious political situation, including the tensions between the two leaders of the Government, must be brought to a resolution. A way must be found to ensure stability in the Government for the long-term.

As one of the world's most aid-dependent countries, it will be difficult for Afghanistan to achieve self-reliance as long as there is conflict. The conflict diverts resources that would be better spent on developing Afghanistan and helping its people. Peace is therefore a requirement. It is imperative that avenues for peace be explored with the utmost urgency and seriousness. Let me briefly talk about positive efforts under way that give cause for hope.

Sustained international support to Afghanistan is vital. The Warsaw Summit sent a message to the Afghan people, including anti-Government elements, that the international community will continue to support the security sector at the current level until 2020. Afghanistan is now preparing for the Brussels Conference, at which the equally vital question of support for Afghan development will be considered. In Brussels, the Government will have an opportunity to secure ongoing development assistance at or near existing levels through 2020. At the meeting of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) on 4 September, the Government demonstrated that its preparations for Brussels are well advanced.

I welcome President Ghani's comprehensive, long-term approach to tackling corruption, which seeks to develop the architecture needed to prevent corruption, as well as hold those responsible for corruption to account. The referral of the first cases to the Anti-Corruption Criminal Justice Centre demonstrates the Government's resolve. Successful, just prosecutions would go a long way towards boosting public confidence.

I also wish to acknowledge the Government's continued progress on other reform and mutual accountability commitments, in particular with regard to preparing the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework and successfully negotiating a new International Monetary Fund programme, after a strong performance in the area of the staff-monitored programme, including with respect to revenue collection.

These achievements establish a firm foundation for the Brussels Conference. By demonstrating the Government's commitment to development, economic

growth and stability, they can build confidence that development funds will used for credible, effective plans. I particularly welcome the inclusiveness of the Government's vision for the Brussels Conference. The Government's attention to poverty reduction at the recent JCMB meeting was widely appreciated.

Decades of conflict have left many women widowed and vulnerable, and as President Ghani noted at the JCMB, the face of Afghan poverty is female. Serious attention to poverty reduction therefore requires dedicated efforts to empower women in both peacebuilding and development. Government planning in those areas is progressing and a side event at Brussels will provide a valuable opportunity to discuss the plans in depth. Similarly, we look forward discussions in Brussels focused on promoting regional cooperation, which is key to the stability and prosperity of the region. Success in Brussels would mark another important step for Afghanistan towards self-reliance.

The National Unity Government faces fundamental challenges, both from outside and from within. Security and political stability are the most fundamental of those. On the security front, it has been another difficult year for Afghanistan. Intensive fighting continues in hotspots around the country. While Kabul has been the target of a series of horrendous suicide attacks, several provincial capitals, including Lashkar Gah, Tirin Kot and Kunduz city, have been under serious pressure, but none has fallen. The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces have been able to display more effective responses compared to last year, and coupled with tactical operations, they have been able for the most part to hold their ground.

The impact of the conflict on civilians remains severe, however. It is with a heavy heart that I must report that yet again, year on year, civilian casualty figures are trending upwards. Nowhere is this trend more apparent than for children, among whom there has been an 18 per cent increase in casualties, with 388 children killed in six months. The attack claimed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant against a demonstration in Kabul on 23 July was a particularly gruesom incident, with 85 civilians killed. The Government promised to investigate in full. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan will share the findings of its own investigation with relevant stakeholders.

I must once again remind all parties to the conflict to strictly abide by their obligation under international human right and humanitarian law to always place the preservation of human life above any other consideration and to give a measurable effect to their commitment to the protection of civilians, women and children in particular. Accountability for violations of these commitments remains weak and must be strengthened by all parties.

The numbers of people newly displaced by conflict have been swelled recently by a massive increase in the number of Afghan families returning from Pakistan. If current trends continue, Afghanistan will have to meet the needs of at least 1 million people on the move. That would require far greater amounts of assistance and would place an overwhelming strain on already overstretched health and other social services. Unless measures are taken soon, many thousands of families will face the prospect of winter with inadequate shelter or support.

No effective policies are possible if the Government is internally divided. Tensions within the Government have surfaced, with public criticism by Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah about what he views as the incomplete implementation of political agreement of 2014. The two leaders have met several times since then to try to identify the issues and to seek solutions. Efforts are still under way and further meetings are expected.

The National Unity Government is at a defining moment. A way forward must be found through a realistic and flexible compromise and a show of true statesmanship. The leaders need to come up with a solution that will allow for the effective functioning of the Government, in both the short and long terms. Afghanistan cannot afford political instability. The leaders must show the people of Afghanistan and to the international community that they are able to govern effectively.

As the second anniversary draws near of the 2014 political agreement that established the National Unity Government, the political opposition has increasingly challenged the legitimacy of the Government. The political agenda must progress constructively, political stability must be maintained and elections must take place. The recent signing by the President of the legislative decree on electoral reform is a constructive development in that regard. The international community is deeply committed to supporting the National Unity Government and would be reassured by continued stability and its effectiveness.

Peace for Afghanistan is a necessity. Without peace, Afghans will continue to suffer and economic growth and prosperity will not materialize. The Taliban has still not demonstrated explicitly a clear commitment to a peace process, despite the many offers of engagement by President Ghani and the international community.

The intensive fighting this summer has shown the conflict to be an endless cycle of gains and reversals, of destruction instead of development, and of continued suffering for Afghan civilians. It is my fervent hope that, as winter approaches and the tempo of the conflict slows, the Taliban will show their willingness to enter into talks with the Afghan Government.

The agreement being negotiated between the Afghan Government and Hezb-i-Islami shows that the Government is sincere about negotiations. Experience shows that peace processes can take months and years. Measures should be taken to build confidence between the Government and the Taliban in order to prepare the way for substantive talks. The sooner a process is started, the less Afghans will suffer. I would therefore urge both sides to come together to find lasting peace for Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has an opportunity to build on the achievements of the past 15 years and to move towards stability and self-reliance. With an effective Government and the continued support of the international community, it has every chance of success.

The President: I thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing.

After consultations among Council members, I have been authorized to make the following statement on their behalf:

"The Security Council reaffirms its support to the Government of Afghanistan and, in advance of the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan to be held on 5 October 2016, co-hosted by the European Union and the Government of Afghanistan, calls on the international community to continue their civilian and development efforts to assist the Government and the people of Afghanistan in a manner consistent with the Self-reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework and with the Afghan leadership and ownership.

"The Security Council underscores the importance of the progress attained by Afghanistan and calls on all political entities to work together to achieve a peaceful and prosperous future for the people of Afghanistan.

"The Security Council reiterates its concern about the security situation in Afghanistan, its condemnation of the terrorist activities by the Taliban, including the Haqqani Network, as well as Al-Qaida, ISIL (Da'esh) affiliates and other illegal armed groups, and its support to the Government of Afghanistan and, in particular, to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, in their task of securing their country and in their fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

"The Security Council also reaffirms its support to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process with a view to achieving lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and calls on all national, regional and international actors to cooperate in this regard.

"The Security Council reiterates its full support to the work of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in the implementation of its mandate as per resolution 2274 (2016), and to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

"The Security Council reiterates its strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan, and reaffirms that Afghanistan's future lies in the building of a stable, secure, economically sustainable State, free of terrorism and narcotics, based on the rule of law, strengthened democratic institutions and the guarantee and enforcement of citizens' rights and obligations."

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2016/14.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): At the outset, let me congratulate New Zealand for its successful leadership of the Security Council this month. We express our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his recent report (S/2016/768) on the situation in my country. We welcome Ambassador Tadamichi Yamamoto as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and thank him for his first briefing to the Council. We look forward to working closely with him and wish him every success in his very important task.

Since the Council's latest deliberations on Afghanistan (see S/PV.7722), on June 21, the country has seen increased armed clashes and suicide attacks, with high civilian casualties, which has tested our resilience and brought the peace process to an impasse. During the same period, thanks to the continuing support of the international community, we have maintained steady progress to enhance the capacity, capability, professionalism and sustainability of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF).

In the midst of vibrant democratic debates as a key feature of recent political developments, the reform agenda of the National Unity Government, in line with Agenda 2030, is bearing fruit. Afghanistan has achieved progress in regional trade and infrastructure connectivity, anti-corruption measures, governance, the rule of law and human rights, legal reform, restoring fiscal sustainability and the integrity of public finance, commercial banking, development planning, social inclusion and private-sector development.

During this summer, the world witnessed terror spread wildly across the globe, with major attacks in nearly 20 countries in three continents. From Libya to Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Yemen, Turkey, Syria, Bangladesh, France, Libya, Mali, Germany, India, Angola, the Congo, Pakistan, Nigeria and the Philippines, terrorist attacks took many innocent lives and inflicted huge damage. It is clear that, as terrorist groups face international pressure at the core, they attempt to strengthen their symbiotic networks and resort to more desperate attacks far and wide.

Afghanistan has also seen an increase in large scale terrorist attacks. In June, Da'esh affiliates terrorized villagers in Nangarhar. A few days later, the Taliban targeted new police recruits outside Kabul. In July, Da'esh affiliates struck again, this time against a peaceful civilian demonstration in Kabul. In August, the Taliban targeted tourist buses in

Herat, followed by an attack on university students in Kabul. In September, they targeted civilians, security officials and an aid group in Kabul. Altogether, around 180 people, predominantly civilians, lost their lives and 435 were wounded in these attacks, with extensive damage to infrastructure. Among the victims were scores of our educated and talented youth who were committed to the rehabilitation and development of their country.

President Ashraf Ghani on August 25 called Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff and asked for serious and practical measures against the organizers of the attack on the American University of Afghanistan in Kabul. These savage attacks in populated urban centres showcased the cowardly behaviour of the terrorist groups and their supporters, aimed at compensating for their so-called spring offensive losses.

We have evidence that most of these attacks were orchestrated outside Afghanistan. Last week alone we seized two trailer trucks entering Afghanistan from Pakistan with 35,700 kilograms of ammonium nitrate, an amount nearly 20 times larger than what was used in the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. Let us take a second to imagine the magnitude of the devastation had the attack, or attacks, been carried out against us or our allies.

Judging from previous experience, as we approach the General Assembly session, the second anniversary of the National Unity Government of Afghanistan and the forthcoming Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, the Taliban and other terrorist groups may escalate their attacks to gain international visibility.

The growing violent extremism and terror worldwide is proof that the current pace of counter-terrorism efforts is at best lax compared to the magnitude of the threat.

Current efforts remain scattered, slow and at times static, and they have proved incapable of matching the sophistication and ever-changing tactics of global terror for its eventual defeat, as far as the experience of Afghanistan is concerned. As a strategic imperative, we must move beyond rhetoric and address the enablers of terrorism, including the role of State elements in orchestrating and facilitating the growth of terror. We need to review the state of United Nations counter-terrorism efforts to identify and address gaps in their implementation and assess what needs to be done by the relevant United Nations agencies to achieve results and effectively fulfil their mandates.

The Taliban's brutal attacks have continued in different parts of the country, with particular focus on the provinces of Helmand, Kunduz and Paktia. Their aim is to create a durable political geography inside Afghanistan for the Quetta Shura and Haggani leadership.

The response from the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces has been remarkable. Successive Taliban and Da'esh attacks were repulsed in different parts of the country, which proves that these extremist factions do not have the capacity to hold territory anywhere in Afghanistan. However, we are putting in place measures to pre-empt rather than react to their attacks. I am pleased to report that in line with my Government's five-year national campaign plan, which focuses on reconciliation, security and stability, the mobility and effectiveness of our security forces have further improved Afghanistan's resilience in the face of the the ongoing security challenges.

Moving forward, the continued support of our international partners remains critically important. We welcome the outcome of the NATO Warsaw Summit last July, which extended the Resolute Support Mission beyond 2016, reaffirmed continuing national contributions to the financial sustainment of the ANDSF until the end of 2020 and enhanced our enduring partnership with NATO. We have committed to further strengthening our security institutions and ensuring service delivery within the rule of law. We will continue to increase our financial contribution to the ANDSF. The empowerment of women will continue in all aspects of Afghan society, including service in the ANDSF and political processes, as well as the full implementation of Afghanistan's national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000). We have already taken the necessary measures to protect children from the effects of armed conflict and have witnessed good, measurable results.

Despite our constant outreach and efforts in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process, Pakistan has yet to utilize the opportunity to play genuine peacemaker. The fact is deserving of attention that based on the Group's road map, they must take the necessary measures against irreconcilable Taliban elements to win the international community's due recognition as a serious and genuine partner in the fight against terrorism.

We thank the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for its renewed focus on promoting peace in Afghanistan. We welcome the upcoming Ulema Conference in Mecca and Medina, which will bring together global Islamic scholars to denounce the violence in Afghanistan.

On 21 September we will celebrate the second anniversary of the signing of the agreement establishing the National Unity Government of Afghanistan. We are committed to the full implementation of the agreement. Discussions are ongoing among the leadership of the National Unity Government to address the overdue commitments stipulated in the agreement.

Let me assure the Council that our entire political elite, irrespective of ethnic and linguistic background or political standing, is committed to preserving the national interest of Afghanistan, with its full support behind our national security forces. Developments, perceived by some as "tensions" in the National Unity Government, and "rising pressures" by political opposition groups, are part of a routine exercise of democratic debate and a hallmark of our vibrant society, where citizens express their views in accordance with their democratic rights. The 2016 World Press Freedom Index ranks Afghanistan higher than all its neighbours and fourth among 13 countries of South and Central Asia in terms of ensuring a culture of free speech. We will work to improve political stability through healthy dialogue over outstanding issues.

I am pleased to present the highlights of our achievements from the past three months. Afghanistan's development needs are being driven by our extensive reform measures to curb corruption, improve service delivery and promote transparency. Our collaboration with regional partners has resulted in projects that will transform the economic landscape of our part of the world. We have already seen the inauguration of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India natural gas pipeline project, the CASA 1000 electricity project and the Chabahar Port agreement, all of which present opportunities for regional cooperation on an unprecedented scale.

In August, we completed a major housing project of 2,015 residential units in Kabul. Additional projects are under way to provide over 11,000 residential units, with support from China and Qatar.

Last week, for the first time in the history of Sino-Afghan relations, a special cargo train between the two countries was officially welcomed in Hairatan, Afghanistan. Additionally, as part of the Khaf-Herat railway project, an Iranian train entered Afghan soil, thereby offering new opportunities for increased economic activity. Such developments reflect a spirit of constructive cooperation for mutual benefit in our region. We urge other neighbours to adopt a similar approach and to avoid measures that undermine

relations, such as the the closing of entry ports, trade blockades, shelling and illegal construction activities along our south-eastern territory.

We urge the Government of Pakistan to choose the path of cooperation to reinforce constructive relations and build trust, a fundamental precondition for peace and stability for both our countries. In that connection, we note with satisfaction the announcement on the completion of Pakistan-funded health projects in Afghanistan by year's end. As a principal component of our foreign policy, we are convinced that regional cooperation and multilateralism are catalysts for peace and prosperity. In that respect, we look forward to the upcoming Afghanistan-India-United States trilateral meeting, to be held on the margins of the General Assembly at its seventy-first. Let me inform the Council that President Ghani is currently in New Delhi on an official visit, and India has just announced another $1 billion in aid towards the development of Afghanistan. We thank India for that pledge.

The Anti-Corruption Criminal Justice Centre and the High Council on Governance, Justice and Anti-Corruption are already operational and reviewing Government corruption cases. Our judicial sector is being revitalized by a set of bold measures. More than 600 judges have been replaced, with 60 judicial officials being prosecuted for corruption and malpractice. We have also announced new appointments and conducted performance reviews to instil a culture of transparency in our State institutions.

In tandem with our economic achievements, our social sector is reaching new heights, with women increasingly assuming leadership positions at different levels of Government. There are more women in senior Government positions now than at any other time in Afghan history. Among them there are four ministers, nine deputy ministers, one governor, one deputy head of the High Peace Council and a number of senior diplomats at a leadership level. The Ministry of the Interior has opened six new child-protection units in police recruitment centres, bringing the country total to 13. We are committed to the protection of children and have prohibited security forces from using schools for military purposes. We are working on the national policy on civilian casualty mitigation, which will be adopted across all Government institutions to better protect our citizens.

However, mainly due to continual attacks by the Taliban and other terrorist groups, the number of internally displaced people has risen, especially in rural areas. Food insecurity and lack of adequate health care remain a challenge among that group, and the Government is focusing its resources to mitigate the crisis. Under the voluntary repatriation programme, the number of returnees has increased significantly. The number of Afghan migrants to Europe has also fallen, as compared to 2015. We are grateful to the United Nations and our international partners for the continued humanitarian assistance.

On counter-narcotics, despite some increase in the production and cultivation of opium, we are focused on continuing eradication efforts despite the security challenges. We are pleased with the outcome of the ninth session of the Regional Intelligence Working Group on Precursors, which, among other issues, identified next steps on the issue of precursor trafficking.

The forthcoming Brussels Conference on Afghanistan will be an opportunity to showcase to the global community our long-fought and hard-won achievements. The focus will be on the joint international and Afghan efforts to increase the effectiveness of sustained international support, multiple Afghan reform measures, including public finance management and anti-corruption, as well as regional efforts to achieve peace and economic prosperity. The preparations for the Conference are ongoing and we have presented the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework to our partners for their final input.

In conclusion, the global security scenario is undergoing significant changes, and Afghanistan's role in the fight against terrorism remains pivotal. We have long suffered at the hands of extremists and paid a very steep price through the blood and sacrifices of our people in standing up against it. Innumerable Afghans have been robbed of the promise of a peaceful future due to years of instability. However, in the past 15 years, the Government of Afghanistan, along with many of our international friends, including the United Nations, has worked hard to restore faith in the values we cherish — freedom, democracy, good governance, the rule of law and human rights for all. We look forward to seeing members of the international community at the Brussels Conference to reiterate pledges of support to Afghanistan and to refocus on the long road ahead in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. A

win for Afghanistan in that realm would be a win for the world, and we would be safer and prosperous together.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand.

I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing. Mr. Yamamoto has assumed his role at pivotal moment for Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has been at war for far too long. Indeed, most Afghan people have no memory of anything but war. New Zealand speaks today as a country that has supported Afghanistan in its pursuit of peace and stability over many decades, stretching back to the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989. Since 2001, more than 3,500 New Zealanders have served in Afghanistan. Some have lost their lives there. We have invested millions of dollars towards supporting Afghanistan's economic development and strengthening its security forces. And we are still there.

New Zealand's contribution is only a small part of the enormous investment made by the international community in Afghanistan's future over the past 15 years. But as we have heard today, sustainable peace remains a distant prospect. The Taliban and other extremist groups continue to pose an existential threat to the Afghan State and to conduct horrific attacks against civilians. The people of Afghanistan will require the support of international partners until the cycle of war and terror is brought to an end. That is why New Zealand joined others in Warsaw in July to reaffirm our support for the security and stability of Afghanistan. We extended the provision of military mentors to the Afghan National Army Officer Academy and funding to the Afghan National Security and Defence Forces. To take any other course would be to concede to the terrorists and accept the failure of the Afghan State.

At the same time, experience has also taught us that no amount of international support can by itself bring Afghanistan peace. It is time for an honest conversation about why peace is proving so elusive — and what needs to change. The future of Afghanistan ultimately lies in the hands of its Government and its people. Over the past 35 years, Afghanistan has been plagued by poor governance. Too often its leaders have prioritized group and personal interests over the welfare of their people, and resorted to graft and the use of force to achieve their goals. The formation of the National Unity Government, two years ago, with its reform agenda, was cause for new hope. It offered an opportunity for the country's leaders to put aside their differences and to establish a Government free from self-interest and corruption. But what do we see today?

Today we see a President and Chief Executive Officer whose relationship is dysfunctional and a failure to undertake the necessary electoral reforms to enable parliamentary elections to be held, thereby undermining the legitimacy of the current Government and sowing the seeds of future electoral disputes and instability. We see a Government that, two years into its existence, has yet to fill senior positions. And we see a host of promised reforms for improving governance and tackling corruption that are yet to be even seriously discussed, let alone implemented. Those failings are profoundly concerning. Continued division and dysfunction within the National Unity Government threatens the progress we have made together over the past 15 years. At a time when the international community is renewing its commitment to Afghanistan, we therefore reiterate our expectations of the Government in return.

First, we expect President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah to overcome their differences and to work together for the good of their people. How can a Government that does not talk to itself hold peace talks with others? We expect promised reforms to be implemented and serious efforts to be made to tackle corruption. We expect credible efforts to enact electoral reform, and elections to be held in a timely manner.

While prospects for a resumption of peace talks may be constrained in the short-term, New Zealand urges the Government to prepare for engagement on peace and reconciliation with all parties. As unpalatable as it may be, achieving a stable and peaceful Afghanistan is ultimately dependent upon achieving some form of reconciliation with elements of the armed opposition.

We also call on Afghanistan's neighbours and international partners to display genuine commitment to the process. The Taliban sanctions regime should be used to create, not obstruct, an environment in which talks can take place. The Afghan Government needs to take on more ownership of this process, which, if properly used, could provide leverage in its negotiations with the armed opposition.

These expectations of the National Unity Government are conveyed in the spirit of friendship

and partnership that has underpinned New Zealand's support for Afghanistan over the past 35 years. We remain determined to honour our commitment, but that will truly benefit the people of Afghanistan only if the National Unity Government does the same.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to other members of the Security Council.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by thanking you, Minister McCully, for agreeing to preside over this meeting of the Security Council. I believe that reflects not just just the importance that New Zealand attaches to this debate, but also the shared feeling among the members of the Council in our support of Afghanistan.

I would also like to welcome the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Ambassador Tadamichi Yamamoto, on his first appearance in the Chamber. The Special Representative can count on Spain's support, and I am sure he can count on the trust of the Security Council.

Allow me as well, as I customarily do — and I would not have it any other way — to associate myself with the statement to be delivered later by the observer of the European Union on behalf of its member States.

Today, we adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2016/14) on Afghanistan. That may be easy to say, but it is of great importance. First, that is because of the relevance of that instrument. We should point that the Council had not adopted a presidential statement on Afghanistan since 2014. Secondly, that is because this adoption underscores once again the unity of the Security Council in its support for Afghanistan, its Government and its citizens — something that is extremely important at this time. Thirdly, that is because of its timeliness. We are a few weeks away from what will undoubtedly be the most important international encounter for Afghanistan of recent years. I am referring to the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan to be held in October. At the Conference, the Government of Afghanistan will share with the international community its new National Peace and Development Framework, which is its strategy to continue its in-depth work on economic, social and institutional development in the country on the basis of the notable successes achieved in previous years. For our part, we members of the international community will have an opportunity to renew our political and financial support for those ongoing efforts for the benefit of all Afghans.

I would now like to refer to the political situation in Afghanistan, to which the Special Representative referred and which is the subject of the report (S/2016/768) of the Secretary-General. Spain supports the Secretary-General's call to all political leaders in Afghanistan to demonstrate responsibility and a spirit of cooperation and to always give pride of place to the common interests and the well-being of the citizens of Afghanistan as they try to find answers to the challenges the country faces. The upcoming Brussels Conference serves to highlight the necessity and importnace of such unity, both along the path to the Conference itself as well as in the period immediately following it.

Moreover, I cannot fail to mention the delicate security situation prevailing in the country. Spain adamantly condemns all acts of terrorism, irrespective of their justification, and we reiterate our support for the Government of Afghanistan in its fight against that scourge. Such actions will not succeed in dampening the determination of the Afghan people to bring about a stable and prosperous Afghanistan — a process in which Afghan women will undoubtedly be called upon to play an important role. I thank the Ambassador Saikal for referring to that issue in his statement.

As a delegation that is particularly committed to that issue, I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his commitment to the women and peace and security agenda. In July, together with his team, he briefed the informal group of experts pursuant to resolution 2242 (2015) and gave us detailed and valuable information on the issue. We also welcome the commitments undertaken by the Government of Afghanistan in recent months, in particular the adoption of its national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000) and its national strategy on the elimination of violence against women. We encourage the Government to invest in effectively implementing them. The challenges are huge and much remains to be done, but this is the correct path.

We also welcome the fact that gender training for UNAMA personnel has been improved and that the leadership of the Mission meets regularly to develop and follow up on its women and peace and security

strategy as part of its efforts to ensure that its Afghan interlocutors give greater importance to the participation and protection of women and girls in Afghanistan. For Spain, that is not a side issue; it is central. That is why we also believe it is important to include strategic and disaggregated information on the issue in the regular briefings to the Council and in the periodic reports of the Secretary-General. The next UNAMA debate, to be held under the Spanish presidency, should be a good time to address the issue.

I do not want to conclude without reiterating Spain's support for the efforts towards a peace and reconciliation process led by and for Afghans. That is the only way to guarantee lasting, stable peace. To those ends, cooperation and coordination by all stakeholders in the region is essential — above all, there is no substitute for it.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): At the outset, I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his briefing and to express our full support for the important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and all the United Nations agencies in supporting Afghanistan and coordinating the international community's assistance, in accordance with the mandate set by resolution 2274 (2016).

While Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union later today, I would like to raise several points in my national capacity.

There were some encouraging signs of progress in Afghanistan during the reporting period, in particular in addressing the security, economic and development challenges faced by the nation. We welcome the efforts of the authorities in countering corruption and terrorism, addressing the fiscal gap and poverty and unemployment, as stipulated in the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework. However, the ongoing political tensions between Afghan senior officials over the lack of effective reforms, including in the electoral sphere, do not reflect well on the National Unity Government of Afghanistan. They can also affect the holding of long-awaited parliamentary and district council elections scheduled for next month. We call on the Afghan leaders to reunite and to focus on addressing the promotion of good governance, the rule of law, anti-corruption efforts and human rights, and on strengthening coordination between the security forces and law enforcement agencies to ensure that they can effectively tackle existing security threats.

Promoting a meaningful, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process should remain a priority to achieve a sustainable resolution of the decades-long conflict in Afghanistan. We regret that during the reporting period no meetings of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group of Afghanistan took place, which is tasked with creatomg a conducive environment for such a process. Likewise, no reduction of hostilities occurred, as the Taliban rejected all calls of the Afghan Government to join the peace and reconciliation process. Moreover, there are alarming signs about the stalemate in the peace negotiations of the National Unity Government with some moderate armed groups and factions. An ongoing offensive by the terrorists throughout the country and recurring suicide attacks with improvised explosive devices in major cities continue to claim a high death toll, and are having an adverse impact on Afghanistan's political, economic and security stability.

As we see it, no tangible progress towards stabilization can occur without the readiness of other regional players to set aside differences and to exert influence on the Taliban leaders by depriving them of shelter and forcing this movement to renounce aggression against Afghanistan and earnestly participate in the peace negotiations. Regional cooperation should also be focused on finding ways to effectively disrupt the Taliban and other terrorist groups' financing by suppressing the narcotics trade and strengthening border security to prevent terrorist fighters travelling to and from the conflict region.

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan continues to warrant our attention in the light of the ever-growing numbers of civilian casualties, especially among women and children, and the high displacement rates of those forced to abandon their homes and to seek refuge from prevalent human rights abuses, in particular against women and girls. The Taliban's recruitment of children is also a cause for great concern. Despite the announced national policy on civilian casualty mitigation, almost an equal number of the attacks on the civilian population are attributed to to anti-Government groups as to the Afghan national forces.

While taking note of positive developments on the gender equality agenda, in particular the elaboration of important legal policies, we would like to underscore

the need of ensuring the full implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security as a critical step in elevating women as full and equal partners in creating a stable future for the country. That is also the challenge in the context of the upcoming elections.

Given all those circumstances, it is essential to provide Afghanistan with appropriate military and financial assistance to achieve palpable results in confronting terrorist, economic and humanitarian threats and to secure a viable future for Afghanistan. Following the NATO Summit in Warsaw, which pledged assistance to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces through 2020, the international community should seize the opportunity offered by the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan in October to support State-building and socioeconomic development in Afghanistan, including to urgently scale-up humanitarian aid to address the needs of more than 1 million internally displaced persons and returnees.

Ukraine acknowledges the primary role of the United Nations in international efforts to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan and the valuable contribution of the relevant international organizations and institutions actively engaged in assisting Afghanistan. It is highly important to provide appropriate coordination for those efforts and to avoid duplication, including through making the best use of existing mechanisms for coordination.

Building synergies between regional organizations and further engagement with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe partner countries, particularly to tackle shared security threats, including those emanating from Afghanistan, is of high significance. A stronger partnership with those organizations present on the ground in Afghanistan can help us to better target and evaluate our activities. To that end, the valuable support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and its regional programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries is of high relevance. With that in mind, Afghanistan-related issues should be further dealt with by a very broad spectrum of actors, while reorienting the policies in Central Asia to better reflect issues related to Afghanistan.

By adopting today's presidential statement on Afghanistan (S/PRST/2016/14), we are sending a clear sign to the Afghan people about the Security Council's full support of Afghanistan in its endeavours to address security, economic and development challenges. However, it is important that the Afghan Government proceed with the actual implementation of national reforms instead of issuing declarative statements. That will help to preserve the confidence of the whole international community and its readiness to assist this country in its struggle for sovereignty and territorial integrity, while creating a sound foundation for peace, security and prosperity both in Afghanistan and the wider region.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in Afghanistan. We wish him every success in his new important post. We carefully listened to the remarks of the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Mr. Mahmoud Saikal.

The situation in Afghanistan, despite all the efforts invested, does not evoke optimism. We note the deteriorating trend in the area of security. Fighting has intensified in various parts of the country. The elimination of the Taliban leader, Mullah Mansoor, has led to a strengthening of the influence of the irreconcilable radicals, first and foremost the Haqqani Network, which has served only to exacerbate the situation.

We are particularly concerned by the spread in the influence and the growth in the numbers of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and its drive to gobble up other armed opposition groups, mainly in the north of the country. If that process is not thwarted, then by next year we could face an even more redoubtable force. In that regard, we were surprised by the fact that in agreeing to the presidential statement on Afghanistan (S/PRST/2016/14)adopted today, our American colleagues refused to include into the text any wording on the growing threat of ISIL. Russia expects a more active use of force by the United States to suppress ISIL fighters in this country.

We strongly condemn the brutal terrorist attacks that have repeatedly struck Kabul and other Afghan cities during the past three months. We expect that the organizers of those crimes will be punished harshly, and that the Afghan authorities will undertake all the necessary measures to ensure security. We extend our heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of those killed and wish a speedy recovery to the victims.

We support the policy of the Government of Afghanistan aimed at achieving national reconciliation. We stand ready to provide assistance in making progress in the negotiations process, including on our flexibly approaching the issue of possible easing of the sanctions regime of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), on the Taliban, if this does not clash with the national interests of the Afghan State.

The main task in the reconciliation process, namely, to draw the Taliban into the peace negotiations, has not been achieved. The Quadrilateral Coordination Group format on organizing direct negotiations between Kabul and the Taliban has not been able demonstrate any positive results to date. A similar picture emerges in the negotiations with Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin, the Afghan extremist Islamic party headed by Hekmatyar. There is little likelihood of a resumption of direct negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan authorities by the end of the year.

We believe that the main responsibility for current developments in the field of security and the training of Afghan soldiers and law-enforcement agents lies with the United States and its NATO allies, which have not to date achieved the stated goals. Many tasks that were taken up by the International Security Assistance Force before the onset of summer remain uncompleted as well. We hope that keeping 8,400 American military personnel in the country through to the beginning of 2017, instead of the earlier-planned 5,500, troops as well as the agreements adopted at the Warsaw NATO Summit will lead to positive changes in the area of security. The key to a sustainable situation, in our view, lies in training and equipping Afghan national security forces so that they can independently safeguard law and order in the country.

Narcotics, manufactured in huge quantities in Afghanistan, threaten the stability of the whole region and beyond. The flow of opiates substantially fuels the financing of terrorism. It is especially important to step up the efforts of the international community in combating the Afghan drug trade.

We note the growing global understanding of the importance of the regional context for an Afghan settlement as well as the increase in the number of platforms focusing on this issue. We believe that it is important that in such platforms' activities regional players should play the decisive role. In that context, we believe that the Istanbul Process, which was also known as the Heart of Asia Process, must generate new ideas rather than duplicate the work of already successfully operating regional organizations.

We are convinced that efforts in assisting Afghanistan must make progress mainly through tried and tested structures, first and foremost of which is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). As is well known, Afghanistan is an observer of the SCO and has been so since 2015. In 2015, at the Ufa summit, it officially requested membership in the organization. To lend additional momentum to this process, we believe it would be useful at this stage to re-establish the SCO-Afghanistan contact group mechanism. Significant potential in bolstering cooperation in counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics also lies in cooperation between Afghanistan and the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Mr. Lamek (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. Minister, for your personal participation today and for your commitment on this issue of such great importance to the Security Council. Let me begin by thanking Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, whom I welcome as the new Special Representative. I think he is quite familiar with Afghanistan, and I wish him every success in his new duties. Finally, I would like to thank Ambassador Saikal for his briefing.

I, too, align myself in advance with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union a little later.

First of all, as we coming up to the second anniversary of the National Unity Government, it is important to note the significant progress made by the Afghan Government since September 2014. France reiterates its full support for the Afghan Government and encourages it to step up its efforts in favour of the development and stabilization of the country.

However, on the eve of the Brussels Conference, the international community's support for Afghanistan as it pursues this transition is essential. The role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in that respect is of course central. I wish to pay tribute to the work undertaken by all United Nations personnel in Afghanistan over the past 15 years. France is gratified by the fact that the Council has been able, through the presidential statement that we have just adopted (S/PRST/2016/14), to reiterate

that message of solidarity and support in a context that remains quite fragile.

Next, and we regularly refer to this point in the Council, it must be emphasized that the challenges that Afghanistan faces every day remain quite daunting. As the Secretary-General indicates in his report (S/2016/768), despite considerable progress achieved by Afghan forces, to which I wish to pay tribute for their commitment and courage, the ongoing deterioration of the security situation is extremely worrying. The recent attacks attributed to the Taliban as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province, or Da'esh, show that the situation remains fragile. France condemns those acts of terrorism in the strongest possible terms, and I would like, on behalf of France, to again express our condolences for those tragedies.

There are a number of difficulties in the economic area. The unlawful economy, corruption and the production and trafficking of drugs must be actively fought, for they are all obstacles to the sustainable re-establishment of security and development of Afghanistan. The development of economic trade with countries of the region and the international community should be encouraged. As Mr. Yamamoto told me earlier, this fragile context makes maintaining the unity of the Afghan Government all the more essential if the challenges are to be met. We call on the Afghan authorities to work to that end.

Finally, the concept of an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process remains more valid than ever, as no peace process can be imposed from the outside. Increased pressure must be exerted on the Taliban by those who possess any influence on them to provide every possible opportunity for a political settlement.

It is important that Afghanistan work closely with its partners in the region on a road map for a sustainable peace. France also calls on all countries in the region to actively and unambiguously support the stabilization of Afghanistan and to contribute positively to the restoration of lasting peace in the country.

The support of the United Nations, particularly through UNAMA, is crucial today, at a time when the flow of refugees who have been expelled from Pakistan is fraught with the risk of bringing the Government and the people of Afghanistan face to face with a very difficult humanitarian situation in the short term, and with reintegration issues in the longer term.

The NATO Summit in Warsaw on 8 and 9 July reaffirmed international support for security in Afghanistan for the next few years. The Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, to be held on October 5, should reaffirm ongoing international support for development, within the framework of mutual commitments.

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate my country's full support for the Afghan Government and for the actions undertaken by the United Nations in support of its efforts.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I join other Council members in thanking you, Mr. Minister, for convening this timely discussion on Afghanistan. Your participation at this meeting, Sir, underlines New Zealand's deep and abiding commitment to Afghanistan and its people. I also wish to congratulate Mr. Yamamoto on his appointment as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), as well as to thank him for his briefing. I would also like to thank Ambassador Saikal of Afghanistan for his comprehensive statement.

In the interests of time, I intend to focus my remarks on three key areas, namely, political and security issues; the protection of civilians, particularly children; and Afghanistan's socioeconomic development.

Special Representative Yamamoto's briefing and the report (S/2016/768) of the Secretary-General both clearly depict the persistent challenges in Afghanistan, especially on the security front. Despite that, we are encouraged that Afghanistan continues to show resilience in addressing the challenges and in making steady progress towards restoring peace and the rule of law. In that regard, we welcome the progress made by the Government in filling key executive posts, and the inclusive manner in which that task was undertaken.

The Government's commitment and ongoing efforts to hold parliamentary and district-level elections are also commendable. The various local peace initiatives, particularly the adoption of resolutions by representatives of provisional Governments and civil society on 20 July, committing themselves towards working towards peace in their districts, are other encouraging developments. The incremental progress achieved in implementing the reform agenda thus far is a step in the right direction and should be further

encouraged and supported by the United Nations and the international community.

The highly volatile security situation within Afghanistan, particularly the persistence of high-level Taliban offensive operations, causing the destabilization of many district centres, continues to be troubling. The midyear protection of civilians report submitted by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, which recorded 5,166 civilian casualties between January and June, clearly underscores the gravity of the situation. That figure marked the highest number of civilian casualties recorded by midyear reports since 2009. With respect to that unacceptably high figure, we are highly concerned at the significant increase in the casualty figures for children, which recorded 388 killed and more than 1,000 injured, marking an incrase of 18 per cent from the previous cycle in 2015.

The widespread use of children in combat, particularly by the Taliban, is abominable and must be strongly condemned by the Council. We also deplore and condemn the deliberate targeting of education and health facilities, resulting in the loss of lives, especially those of children. The Taliban and other perpetrators responsible for causing such a massive scale of death and destruction must be held to account. We reiterate our call on all parties to undertake the measures necessary to uphold their obligation to ensure the safety, security and well-being of all children in the country.

On a related note, Malaysia looks forward to the finalization of the Government's national policy on civilian casualty mitigation. Additionally, the issuance of directives to security forces, prohibiting the use of schools for military purposes, the opening of six new child protection units in police recruitment centres, the release of children from adult detention facilities, and steps taken to ensure the rights of children held on national security charges are all positive developments that will contribute to the country's long-term peace and stability. It is our hope that the implementation of those and other related measures will result in tangible and positive improvements in the security situation in Afghanistan.

The promotion of social and economic development is essential to the long-term stability of Afghanistan. In that context, we commend and welcome Afghanistan's accession as a full member to the World Trade Organization (WTO). Alongside ongoing cooperation with regional partners and the international community, including through the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, we believe that Afghanistan's WTO membership will open doors and boost prospects for further economic activities that will further improve the socioeconomic well-being of its people.

The commitment and efforts of the Afghanistan Government to improve governance and the economic reform process, including through the implementation of the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework for 2017-2018 and the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework, are important steps towards ensuring the country's long-term economic sustainability. This must be supported by the international community. We look forward to the upcoming Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, which will present opportunities for partners to complement and assist the country's reconstruction and development efforts.

While we agree that substantial progress has been made in Afghanistan over the past 15 years, significant challenges persist and threaten to reverse these hard-won gains. During this critical period, we call on all parties to demonstrate a spirit of cooperation towards achieving national unity and lasting stability. I conclude by reaffirming our full support for the commitment of the Government of Afghanistan and for the important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the authorities towards achieving last peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to begin by thanking Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, for his important introduction of the Secretary-General's quarterly report (S/2016/768). I thank him for all his efforts since he assumed his post. We are convinced that he will continue to support the United Nations presence in Afghanistan and to address issues of importance to the United Nations and the Mission he leads.

I commend the Afghan Government for its efforts to strengthen its national institutions so that they can address the challenges they face, particularly with respect to security and terrorism. In that regard, I stress the historic ties between Egypt and Afghanistan. We must all come together in support of the National Unity Government, particularly because the scourge of terrorism is not limited to its various current

manifestations and affects all of Asia, reaching so far as the Middle East.

The report of the Secretary-General refers to the increasing danger posed by the presence of Da'esh in Afghanistan to the international community. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province continues to carry out its terrorist operations in recent months, despite the attempts of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and the international forces to suppress them. The head of that group was recently killed. We must continue, in the context of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, to fight and eradicate that group wherever it is found.

Egypt maintains its cooperation, dating back to 2007, with Afghanistan in the area of strategic training for the Afghan army and police, under the auspices of the Egyptian Agency of Partnership for Development. We hope to engage in tripartite cooperation in that area and that donors will provide the funding necessary to cover the expenses for that very important training. Egypt and Afghanistan also cooperate in other areas, including the fight against human trafficking and illegal immigration. Al-Azhar University also plays an essential role in promoting Islamic thought and moderation and the rejection ofviolence in Afghanistan by dispatching instructors to Afghan teaching institutions and providing annual study grants.

Egypt attaches great importance to the strengthening and political development of Afghanistan and, in the light of that country's key geographical position in the region, welcomes the various economic initiatives, such as the transfer of energy resources to the Central Asian region, the oil pipeline under development, and a dam that will help to enhance friendly relations and stability.

Drug trafficking represents a serious threat. We call on the Afghan authorities to combat such trade and to cooperate at the regional and international levels in the context of the war on terrorism. Egypt firmly supports efforts to develop Afghan society and restore infrastructure. We have answered the appeal to participate in the Brussels Conference in October, and hope to play an active role there in our capacity as a guarantor of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing, and especially for his focus on both opportunity and hope. The United States welcomes his appointment and thanks him and his team for their sustained commitment to the Afghan people. I also thank you, Foreign Minister McCully, for presiding over this meeting and for New Zealand's commitment to supporting Afghanistan, including through your country's contribution of personnel to train Afghan security forces. We also thank you, Mr. President, for reading out today's presidential statement S/PRST/2016/14, which we believe accurately reflects the realities on the ground, in particular with regard to security and terrorism.

As we all know, Afghanistan continues to face grave challenges. But now is not the time for the international community to disengage from Afghanistan. To the contrary, we must continue to work with the Afghan Government and its neighbours to advance a more secure, prosperous and inclusive future for the Afghan people. Let me point out three essential ways we can do that.

First, we can redouble our commitment to Afghanistan's security. The United States condemns the increased attacks this year by the Taliban against civilians, humanitarian workers and the Government. The meticulous data collection of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has made clear the tremendous toll that that violence has taken on Afghanistan's civilians. According to UNAMA, 5,166 civilians were killed or injured in the first six months of this year — the highest six-month figure since 2009. Afghanistan's children are among the most vulnerable, as Special Representative Yamamoto just noted. Between January and June of this year, 1,509 children were killed or wounded. Behind those statistics, of course, are devastated and broken families left behind to experience suffering that stretches across generations.

Take 25-year-old Mohammed Hassan, a construction worker killed in a 23 July suicide attack claimed by Da'esh against peaceful Hazara protesters in Kabul. When Mohammed was a child, according to a family member, he lost his father to Afghanistan's former communist Government. Mohammed's death leaves behind a 5-year-old son and a baby daughter, another Afghan generation suddenly fatherless due to violence. As Ambassador Saikal noted, a few weeks ago the world witnessed the Taliban's brutality during the attack against the American University of Afghanistan, which killed 13 people and wounded nearly 50 more. The United States extends its deepest

condolences to the families of the victims. One of those killed was a law lecturer named Naqib Ahmad Khpulwak. As an undergraduate at Nangarhar University, he finished first in his class and went on to study here in the United States at Stanford Law School, where he served as a visiting student research scholar at the Afghanistan Legal Education Project and at Old Dominion University. He was about to start a doctoral programme at Oxford. Naqib returned to his country to help because he believed in it, and now he is gone. According to reporting, authorities told his family that he died while trying to help his students escape.

All of us need to step up to help Afghanistan and end this scourge. The United States is committed to helping Afghan security forces respond to such attacks and to counter terrorist groups. That is why President Obama decided to maintain approximately 8,400 United States service members in Afghanistan until 2017. As President Obama said,

> "It is in our national security interest that we give our Afghan partners the very best opportunity to succeed."

In recent weeks, the Afghan military and security services have conducted offensive operations across the country and thus far have held major cities in this fighting season. It will nonetheless take years for Afghan security forces to counter terrorist groups alone. That is why NATO allies and partners recommitted in Warsaw in July to help Afghanistan develop the capabilities of its security forces through 2020. The international community can further help to end the conflict and enable a responsible drawdown by helping to establish a peace and reconciliation process among the Afghan Government, the Taliban and other armed groups. The Afghan Government deserves credit for working to foster that process, and the United States continues to explore all avenues to bring the Taliban to the table. We remain open to exploring new opportunities to nurture regional cooperation once peace negotiations are under way. And we encourage Afghanistan's neighbours in particular to support the Afghan Government in its pursuit of a negotiated settlement. Promoting peace also means that all countries in the region must work to end safe havens for militants and terrorists.

One consequence of Afghanistan's insecurity is the challenge of internal displacement. Since early July, there has been a sharp increase in the return to Afghanistan of refugees and undocumented Afghans. We are concerned that some of those returns are not voluntary. Rather, refugees and undocumented Afghans are returning due to harassment, problems with local communities abroad and loss of opportunities for self-reliance. Afghanistan's neighbours must maintain their commitments to ensure voluntary and safe returns. We also encourage partners to consider funding the just-released United Nations $152 million flash appeal for refugees, which the United States is reviewing now.

Secondly, addressing Afghanistan's security challenges requires all of us to invest in promoting the country's political stability. Of course, tensions between President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah have made that objective harder to achieve. But establishing a more effective working relationship between President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah was always going to be a challenging effort. Despite their differences, the two leaders remain committed to a vision of a more secure, prosperous and inclusive future for the country. Both entered into a political agreement to reach certain goals. It remains up to the leaders of Afghanistan to work out their governing arrangements. They must remain engaged and put the interests of Afghanistan first.

When they do, we see that progress is possible. President Ghani and the National Unity Government should be commended for taking steps to root out corruption. The Government has worked to reopen criminal cases against those who stole money from the Afghan people, remove corrupt judges and other public officials and establish the High Council on Governance, Justice and Anti-Corruption, as Ambassador Saikal also noted. Earlier this summer, the Government inaugurated a new Anti-Corruption Criminal Justice Centre, which is designed to shield investigators, prosecutors and judges from political pressure in sensitive corruption cases. If fully implemented, that will be an important step towards fighting impunity. We must encourage the Afghan Government to make similar efforts to resolve other pressing issues, such as electoral reform, and to follow through on its reform commitments.

Thirdly, turning to Afghanistan's development, members of the Security Council share a strong interest in making sure that the economic conditions are in place to promote stability. That is why we are urging countries to participate and make concrete pledges of development assistance at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan scheduled for next month. The Conference will define the future of international assistance for

the next four years, through 2020. We recognize that Governments already made generous commitments to sustain security assistance to Afghanistan at the NATO Summit in Warsaw in July. But security assistance is not enough. Achieving stability in Afghanistan will require us to renew our commitment to address the dire need for education, health care and economic opportunity. And it will require the Afghan Government to renew its commitment to make the reforms necessary for international investments in these sectors to generate economic growth. Any precipitous decline in assistance will put at serious risks the gains that Afghans have achieved over the past 15 years. Members of the Council and the international community cannot forget that Afghanistan's security is our security. That was true in 2001 and it remains true today. When we commit to a more stable Afghanistan, we are committing to an Afghanistan that never again serves as a safe haven for terrorism.

There are many Afghans committed to forging a better future. One of them was Sami Sarwari, a young student who was starting as a freshman at the American University of Afghanistan this year. Sami Sarwari was a musician on a scholarship who was so talented that he performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., in 2013. Like many students arriving on university campuses this fall, Sami was looking forward to this new chapter in his life. And on Facebook, Sami checked into the American university of Afghanistan and posted "I'm in. Looking forward to a beautiful and bright future". He died a short while later when terrorists attacked his campus.

But Sami's vision is what should animate all of us here today. With our sustained support, we will keep working towards a more stable, democratic and free Afghanistan, the future that so many young Afghans, people like Sami, want to build.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): Mr. Minister, we welcome your presiding over this debate and the adoption of the presidential statement (S/PRST/2016/14) that you have just read out on behalf of the Security Council as a demonstration of the Council's support of and commitment to Afghanistan. We also welcome the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto. We thank him for his briefing and extend our praise and support to UNAMA and its personnel, who are working in extremely challenging conditions.

Two years after the establishment of the National Unity Government, the situation in Afghanistan remains unpredictable. Despite the remarkable advances registered in the past 15 years and the genuine efforts made by the Government to advance towards peace, stability and national reconciliation, much remains to be done. Among the many challenges facing the country, the fight against poverty, the implementation of political reforms, specifically the electoral system, and the security situation remain sources of the utmost concern. Tackling such challenges requires unity in the country's leadership, cooperation and a spirit of compromise in order to strengthen the Government's capacity to implement much-needed reforms for the benefit of the Afghan people.

Also of great concern is the increasingly volatile situation in the country, the persistent security challenges and the growing pressure from the political opposition, which the ambassador of Afghanistan describes as "part of a routine exercise of democratic debate and a hallmark of our vibrant society, where citizens express their views in accordance with their democratic rights". This is remarkable progress in Afghanistan's political development, to be maintained and strengthened.

The security situation has not improved against the backdrop of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces' engagement against the Taliban. Tersistent acts of violence by terrorists, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, suicide bombings and other forms of violence are the main causes of the ever-rising numbers of civilian casualties.

UNAMA's semiannual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in Afghanistan, released in July, sheds grim light on the number of civilian casualties victims of the conflict. The indiscriminate killing of civilians deserves our most energetic condemnation, and once again we urge all parties involved in the conflict to respect their obligations under human rights and international humanitarian law.

We praise NATO's decision, taken at the Warsaw Summit, by which its members and contributors to the Resolute Support Mission formalized the agreement on the continuation of the mission in Afghanistan beyond 2016, a crucial decision considering the intensified conflict in the country. It is widely understood that sustained stability and prosperity in Afghanistan are dependent on national reconciliation based on respect

for human rights and essential freedoms, on regional and international cooperation, mutual respect and non-interference in one another's internal affairs. The Afghan Government's efforts in reaching out to its neighbours and fulfilling its regional commitments, mainly concerning security and economic issues, are praiseworthy, as well as the Chinese initiative to hold discussions on counter-terrorism measures in the context of the Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism, comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan, which resulted in pledges by those countries to strengthen coordination and information-sharing, including border management.

Insecurity and deep-rooted discrimination against women, in particular regarding their fundamental rights and freedoms, are absolutely unacceptable. We took note of the statement by the Ambassador of Afghanistan that

> "women [are] increasingly assuming leadership positions at different levels of Government. There are more women in senior Government positions now than at any other time in Afghan history".
>
> It is our hope that this trend will be irreversible and that women will occupy their rightful place in Afghan society.

We welcome the Government's efforts to combat violence against women and girls, and the approval of the strategy and the action plan on the elimination of violence against women for the period 2016–2020. We encourage the Afghan Government to effectively implement the measures laid out in the plan allowing women to exercise their legitimate rights and guaranteeing their protection.

In concluding, we wish to reiterate our support to the Afghan Government in this extremely difficult struggle against the forces of evil and darkness. The Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, to be held on 5 October and organized by the European Union and the Government of Afghanistan, signals the determination of the international community to pursue efforts to help the Government and the people of Afghanistan in a consistent manner to foster self-reliance and accountability. It is vital that the international community maintain its commitment towards Afghanistan, taking into account the fact that the future of the country depends upon the building of a stable, safe, economically sound State free from terrorism and criminal networks, with reliable democratic institutions guaranteeing the rights and duties of all Afghan citizens.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to thank the presidency of New Zealand for having convened this debate under its programme of work and also to thank Minister McCully for presiding over our meeting today. I should like also to thank Ambassadors Yamamoto and Saikal, respectively, for their briefings.

First, I should like to welcome the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Tadamichi Yamamoto, and to wish him every success in his work. We also thank all of the United Nations personnel working in Afghanistan for their dedication and stress the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in fulfilling its mandate under extremely difficult conditions.

Uruguay would also like to acknowledge the work of the delegation of Spain in preparing and negotiating the presidential statement (S/PRST/2016/14) that we have just adopted today. Uruguay reiterates its support for the Government of Afghanistan and encourages it to continue its efforts to move towards a lasting peace that is based on sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity. The instability and insecurity that prevail in the country continue to require the ongoing support of the international community to overcome the obstacles that it is facing in the political and security areas, which have a direct effect on its economic development. We deplore the fact that the political divisions seen over the past few weeks have put the Government's unity to the test. In that respect, we call on the country's authorities to act with the necessary leadership so as to bring about an agreement that will provide stability and make it possible to carry out the relevant reforms for the benefit of the Afghan people. International solidarity will also be required to that end. In the same vein, we call for sustained efforts to bring about direct talks between the Government and the Taliban that will create conditions conducive to peace in Afghanistan.

The October Brussels Conference on Afghanistan will be an important opportunity for the Afghan people to continue to determine their future and to achieve progress related to the strengthening of their institutions, the rule of law, respect for human rights, economic growth and reduction of poverty, among others. The support of the other countries in the region will also be critical to achieving economic growth and to addressing issues related to peace and security.

Security problems continue to beset the Afghan people and many armed clashes and suicide attacks persist. We regret that in only the first quarter, the conflict has killed or wounded 5,166 civilians. Uruguay is still deeply concerned over the humanitarian situation that continues to deteriorate with new internal displacements resulting from the conflict and exacerbated by lack of access. We regret that humanitarian workers have been wounded or killed and we deplore continued reports of limited humanitarian access.

Our country attaches particular importance to the secure and swift access of humanitarian aid to conflict zones, in order to avoid critical situations that prolong the suffering of the civilian population. In that regard, we note that blocking humanitarian aid is a clear violation of international humanitarian law.

As the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/768) indicates, displaced people continue to be extremely vulnerable. Food insecurity and limited access to basic services such as health, water and sanitation have exacerbated the existent health problems and malnutrition. Over the past 15 years, over 1,100,000 people have been forcibly displaced from their homes due the conflict, with 245,000 in 2016 alone. The levels of malnutrition are alarming, affecting 2.7 million people, including 1 million children under 5. Only 35 per cent of affected children receive medical attention, and only 25 per cent of those treatments are successful.

As such, the protection of civilians, particularly women and children, has become critical. That is why Uruguay believes there is an urgent need to respect their fundamental rights. We call for child education and the adoption of new legislation that will ban abhorrent practices such as child marriages and bacha bazi, also known as bacha bereesh.

As set forth in paragraph 34 of the Secretary-General's report, the Government continued its efforts to address violence against women and girls. On 11 June, the Government approved the 2016-2020 strategy and action plan for the elimination of violence against women. We hope that strategy will soon bear fruit and allow Afghan women to emerge from the stagnation and oppression in which they have lived for the past 30 years.

Uruguay reiterates its call to fully implement resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of the wounded and sick, medical facilities and medical personnel, adopted on 3 May by the Security Council, which would be particularly applicable in Afghanistan as it makes difficult the work of medical personnel in charge of vaccination campaigns for the civilian population.

Finally, Uruguay wishes to thank all United Nations personnel and other humanitarian workers who face extreme security situations on a daily basis. We trust that their efforts in bringing aid to thousands of Afghans in need, while putting their own lives at risk amidst persistent abductions and attacks, along with appropriate Government measures will soon give rise to improved living standards for all Afghans.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): Let me first express my gratitude to the presidency for convening this timely debate. I would like to welcome the Secretary-General's Special Representative, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, who made his first briefing today. Japan looks forward to working with him and is ready to assist his efforts in any way possible.

As we have heard in the briefing by Special Representative Yamamoto, Afghanistan has seen some positive developments, but also has areas that require further improvement. We welcome the National Unity Government's continued reform efforts as the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan approaches. International expectations are high for the outcome of anti-corruption initiatives in support of the steady implementation of the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework.

Japan welcomes the Government's establishment of the Anti-Corruption Criminal Justice Centre. It is essential that the Center deepen trust between the Government and Afghan citizens, as well as between the international community and the Government, through increased transparency and reform.

Since the previous debate (see S/PV.7722) on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), in June, we have witnessed two major positive developments in the economic sector. The first is that Afghanistan achieved full membership in the World Trade Organization. The second is that the International Monetary Fund approved a $45 million three-year extended credit facility agreement for Afghanistan. Afghanistan's achievements on economic reform deserve to be highlighted. Afghanistan is striving to become an export-oriented economy, and we note that the National Unity Government has been focusing on expanding agricultural productivity. Agriculture is a key sector for generating jobs and income, and over the

past few years, Afghanistan has invested in irrigation and water management. Japan supports Afghanistan in exploring its agricultural potential as part of its efforts towards self-reliance.

Sadly, there is little good news about Afghanistan's political and security situation. On 23 July we saw the deadliest single terrorist attack in Afghanistan since 2001, while UNAMA reported the highest number of civilian casualties in a six-month period since 2009. Japan is also concerned by the continued abductions, assassinations and military clashes, as well as the Secretary-General's recent observation that tensions have increased significantly between President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah. The peace process is essential to Afghanistan's future security, but unfortunately we have seen no real progress in that area.

Long-standing trafficking in narcotics remains a persistent and dire problem in Afghanistan. Profits from the illegal narcotics trade flow to the Taliban and other insurgent groups, causing many negative consequences. Japan, together with the Russian Federation and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, has supported training programmes for counter-narcotics police officers from both Afghanistan and Central Asian countries, thereby simultaneously contributing to strengthening regional cooperation. However, there remains much to do in addressing the country's ongoing narcotics challenges.

Today, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2016/14) reaffirming our support for the National Unity Government. Japan strongly urges political actors at all levels to work together in support of a truly united national Government that can address Afghanistan's many difficult issues. We look forward Special Representative Yamamoto's leadership in implementing UNAMA's mandate, and pledge our continued support for efforts in Afghanistan going forward.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I join others in welcoming Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto for his first briefing to the Security Council and thank him for his leadership at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

It is sadly apt that we are holding this debate just a few days after the fifteenth anniversary of the 11 September attacks. It was those barbaric acts of terrorism that brought the focus of the world and of the Council on Afghanistan. Just 15 years later, that focus has perhaps faded, but it is undeniable that the country has been transformed. Yet it is also clear that Afghanistan still faces enormous challenges to its stability and security. That is why, 15 years on, my Government remains committed to Afghanistan's stability and development. It is why we announced at the NATO Warsaw Summit in July that the United Kingdom would increase its troop contribution to NATO's Resolute Support Mission, and that is why we have committed to provide ongoing financial support to the Afghan National Security and Defence Forces through 2020.

International support alone will not solve the formidable challenges Afghanistan faces. Unity of purpose and political cohesion are essential for security and stability. Let us therefore all support and encourage the National Unity Government as it pursues its ambitious programme of reform. There is much to do. Electoral reforms are critical to re-establish public confidence in Afghan institutions. Anti-corruption efforts are needed for future prosperit. And overcoming internal differences will enable the Government to deliver better services for the population at large. We recognize that steps towards reform are being taken.

We welcome the Government's efforts to address violence against women and girls, and the Special Representative's reporting on the issue. The United Kingdom will continue to support initiatives that empower Afghan women. Together, we must ensure that the historic, but fragile, gains on women's rights are not lost.

The upcoming Brussels Conference on Afghanistan in October will be a key moment for the Government to demonstrate its own commitment to reform. It is also the moment for the international community to renew its ongoing commitment to a more stable, secure and prosperous future for Afghanistan.

While we have seen progress in some areas in the early years of the transformation decade, many things still remain to be done. That is easy for me to say in these comfortable surroundings. My Government is well aware of the challenges posed by the conflict with the Taliban and other insurgent and terrorist groups. Therefore, we firmly believe that a political settlement is the only viable, long-term solution, and the United Kingdom strongly supports efforts towards such a settlement. In that respect, we urge the Government

to make every effort to create a broad base of support for constructive engagement with the Taliban. But until that peace is secured, the Afghan security forces must continue their vital work. I pay tribute to their bravery today. They are standing up to the Taliban and other groups across the country, staving off pressure in Uruzgan, Helmand, Kunduz and elsewhere, often at terrible cost. The United Kingdom is committed to help develop their capability, and we welcome the robust actions taken by Afghanistan to combat the emerging threats posed by Da'esh affiliates in eastern Afghanistan. The threats arising from those groups are very real, and united international support is needed in response.

Afghanistan's regional neighbours, as well as the international community, will also have to play their part to support peace. My Government believes that a positive, balanced and equitable relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan is of particular importance. It is vital that both sides engage constructively, while recognizing each other's constraints and objectives. Dialogue is important, especially at a time of heightened tension. In that respect, I want to emphasize the importance my Government attaches to an effective response to the emerging refugee crisis. We have witnessed a dramatic increase in refugee returns, flowing from Pakistan into Afghanistan. As highlighted by the Special Representative, the numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons are unprecedented, and the National Unity Government will require significant support from the international community to address the short-term requirements. It is critical, therefore, that an agreed action plan be put in place as soon as possible and that a longer-term approach be developed to address push-and-pull factors in both countries.

Fifteen years on from the terrible events that led to international intervention in Afghanistan, it is too easy to focus on the problems the country still faces. Yes, we are still some way from shifting gears from consolidation and stability towards development and economic growth. But we cannot lose sight of how much has been achieved. With our continuing assistance and support, we firmly believe that Afghanistan will emerge from these challenging times to enjoy the peace and prosperity that so many of us take for granted.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks New Zealand for convening this debate on Afghanistan. We welcome Minister for Foreign Affairs McCully to the Security Council and thank him for presiding over the meeting earlier today. We also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his briefing, and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, for his statement.

Recently, the Afghan National Unity Government has made unremitting efforts at maintaining national stability, promoting national reconciliation and pushing ahead with economic development. Nevertheless, Afghanistan still faces grave challenges in the political, economic and security spheres. All communities in Afghanistan should step up their unity and join forces in promoting national reconstruction. The international community should also continue its assistance in support of Afghanistan and push for the early achievement of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan. I would like to emphasize the following points.

First, it is imperative to remain unwavering in the commitment to the general direction of national reconciliation. Achieving national reconciliation is the master key to addressing the problems facing Afghanistan. All parties in Afghanistan should focus on national development and the interests of the people by restarting peace talks. The international community should continue to step up its efforts and go all-out in support of an Afghan-led and -owned inclusive reconciliation process and make substantive efforts for the achievement of reconciliation in the country.

Secondly, it is crucial to ensure the irreversibility of the security situation in Afghanistan. Maintaining a stable Afghanistan in terms of security is of paramount importance to the development and prosperity of country. The armed conflicts inside Afghanistan and the terrorist activities by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and by Al-Qaida, among others, pose a serious threat to the security and stability of Afghanistan. The international community should support Afghanistan's national security forces in capacity-building, while beefing up their independent capacity for self-defence and counter-terrorism, and safeguarding Afghanistan's security and stability.

Thirdly, it is absolutely indispensable to help Afghanistan bolster its governance without let up. Matters relating to Afghanistan should ultimately be determined by the Afghans themselves. Currently, Afghanistan is engaged in preparing its new National Peace and Development framework. The international

community should, on the basis of the development strategy determined by the Afghans and the specific needs help the Government, improve administrative capability and consolidate the fruits of national reconstruction. All political parties and factions in Afghanistan should be committed to defusing their differences through dialogue and consultation and join hands in advancing the peaceful reconstruction process in Afghanistan.

Fourthly, it is imperative to ensure that the development process in Afghanistan makes further progress without backtracking. Promoting economic and social development is vital to safeguarding a stable Afghanistan. The international community should encourage and support Afghanistan in fully leveraging its advantages in resources and geographical location and push for progress in building infrastructure and developing trade and investment, among other areas. Meanwhile, it should also promote the development of friendly relations and cooperation for mutual benefit between Afghanistan and its neighbours, as well as Afghanistan's participation in regional linkages and communication and economic cooperation, so as to achieve full integration in regional development.

China is a good neighbour and good friend of Afghanistan. China supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process in the country. China has taken an active part in various mechanisms, such as the Quadrilateral Coordination Group made up of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States of America, in an effort to create enabling external environments for the achievement of reconciliation. We are ready to link up China's One Belt, One Road initiative with the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. China is also hoping that the related international assistance mechanisms for Afghanistan will continue to contribute positively to the achievement of lasting peace and sustainable development in Afghanistan.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): Senegal welcomes the holding of this debate and we are pleased to see Minister McCully participate in it personally.

This debate, taking place in the context of the consideration of the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/768) on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace security, affords us a new opportunity to look into the situation in Afghanistan, which is more worrying than ever. In that regard, I would like to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for this excellent briefing. I also take this opportunity to wish him every success in his new duties. Of course, he will be able to count on the full support of the delegation of Senegal.

Since our previous meeting (see S/PV.7722) here in the Chamber a few months ago, some progress has certainly been achieved in Afghanistan. However, we are forced to note, taking stock of the past threet months, that the political situation remains rather fragile, while the security situation continues to deteriorate. That has resulted in a number of difficulties in terms of human rights violations and also at the humanitarian level. However, fortunately, the combined efforts of the Afghan Government, its regional partners and of the international community, especially UNAMA, continue to attenuate the negative impacts of this complex crisis and provide us with a glimmer of hope.

Following the recent political and security developments, the situation remains quite concerning. At the security level, continuing clashes with the Taliban and other armed groups have claimed an unprecedented number of civilian lives since the United Nations started to systematically count the deaths in 2009. That has also led to a great many displaced persons, as indicated in the report under consideration, while armed clashes continue and suicide attacks unfortunately proliferate.

This unfortunate picture has been corroborated by the attack on 23 July against a Hazara demonstration in Khorasan province, which was claimed by Da'esh. Furthermore, prospects for a possible peace process with the Taliban have remained limited. Their determination to continue their attacks and to continue to expand their territorial gains remains almost intact. However, it is more important than ever to transcend the current impasse in which the peace negotiations between the Afghan Government and a number of armed groups find themselves. NATO's support to Afghan troops turns out to be crucial to weaken radical elements and prompt them to come to the negotiating table.

This is also the right time to encourage the Afghan Government in its efforts in favour of the protection of women and children, in a context where violations of human rights continue to take place.

Turning to the humanitarian situation, it remains more disquieting with the increase in the number of displaced people. We pay tribute to the humanitarian

community for its commitment in Afghanistan, where it continues its work to help impacted populations, especially the most disadvantaged and vulnerable segments of the population, sometimes at the very risk of their own lives.

Faced with such an alarming situation, we should welcome the continuing support shown by the international community, including NATO forces, and their continued cooperation with the Afghan Government. We also pay tribute to the spirit of cooperation and understanding that has prevailed between Afghanistan and Pakistan following the June incidents on the border in Torkham. We welcome the relaunching of regional cooperation in the diplomatic, security and economic fields between Afghanistan and its partners, such as India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the People's Republic of China, Tajikistan and the Russian Federation. We welcome the Afghan Government's continuing preparations for the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan planned for 5 October and the elaboration of its National Peace and Development Framework. We hope that the Conference will facilitate the process that has been launched aimed at achieving lasting peace and that it will lend momentum to economic and social development, which will require a bolstering of efforts in the fight against corruption, as initiated by the Afghan Government.

In conclusion, my delegation encourages the Government of Afghanistan and its partners and neighbours to step up their efforts in favour of a peace, which we hope will be lasting and to the benefit of all.

Mr. Arcia Vivas (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to begin our intervention by thanking the presidency of New Zealand for convening this debate, and Minister McCully for presiding over it. We also thank the Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his briefing. We welcome him and we support his commendable efforts as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for peace and stability in Afghanistan. We should highlight the work done by UNAMA, which has been essential to promoting peace, national reconciliation, regional cooperation and economic and social development. We would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, our friend Ambassador Saikal, for his statement.

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is very concerned about the delicate political and security situation in Afghanistan, which poses great challenges for the country. As the Secretary-General points out in his report (S/2016/768), the levels of violence arising from the Taliban and other non-State actors have had great impact on the civilian population, which has been forced into displacement to other areas of the country in order to avoid clashes between armed groups.

The security situation has been adversely affected by the ongoing military operations of the Taliban, which have been carrying out a military campaign that has tested the Afghan national security system. In that regard, we note with concern how the statistics relating to armed clashes increased by 14.7 per cent between May and July. Likewise, the armed conflict in Afghanistan continues to affect the civilian population, who are the main victims of armed clashes between the parties. According to report, 1,600 people were killed and 3,575 were injured during the reporting period, the highest figure recorded since 2009. The UNAMA report indicates that women and children are the most affected by the spiral of violence. Since the beginning of 2016, we have seen an increase in executions of women by non-State actors. To this we must add the use of children as soldiers and the tragic toll of 213 boys and girls killed in fighting on the ground. In that context, Venezuela reiterates its call for the Taliban insurgents to resolutely join the peace talks. We support the statement made by the Secretary-General, which has been reported on several occasions, that direct negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan Government are key to this dynamic, but must not undermine the role of the international community in support of these initiatives.

We believe that strengthening dialogue and mutual trust among all parties is essential to consolidating peace. It is therefore necessary to redouble efforts in that direction, with the support of the international community. In this regard, we welcome the efforts of the High Peace Council, which has made progress in its programmes of action towards a national reconciliation strategy.

Afghanistan has also been destabilized by the presence of the so-called Islamic State, whose terrorist cells are a threat to peace and security in the region. In this regard, presidential statement S/PRST/2016/14, which the Council has just adopted, provides elements

to that end, while condemning the terrorist attacks of that organization, such as the latest in Kabul last July, in which hundreds of civilians were killed by terrorist acts.

At the political level, we call for the Afghan leadership to work on behalf of the people and thereby bridge the differences that hinder the achievement of the objectives set by the National Unity Government. In that regard, we welcome the achievements made in electoral reform, and recognize the intention of the Afghan Government to hire advisers to the President in various fields, such as education, security and internal affairs.

In the field of the political empowerment of women within the framework of resolution 1325 (2000), we stress the efforts of the Afghan Government in adopting the strategy and action plan on the elimination of violence against women for the period 2016-2020. We also recognize the interaction between UNAMA and the authorities of that country to strengthen protection services for women and eradicate violence against women. The establishment of centres to address this issue reflects the commitment of the Afghan Government in this area, and we encourage it to continue working in that direction. We welcome the progress made in increasing the participation of Afghan women in positions of leadership at various Government levels.

We emphasize that strengthening dialogue and cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan is necessary to contribute to stability in the region. We regret the fact that once again the report reflects political disagreements between the two countries. In that regard, we hope that they will be overcome for the benefit of their peoples. Common challenges in the political, economic and security fields require greater understanding on the part of the respective authorities in order to overcome the mistrust and problems that affect them. We welcome the strengthening of regional cooperation between Afghanistan, India and Iran, which continues with trilateral transport projects and transit that will facilitate trade among those States and the countries of Central Asia. The ongoing high-level visits to Afghanistan are a clear manifestation of this trend towards dialogue and the solving of problems of common interest to the region.

The Brussels Conference for the development of Afghanistan, to be held in October, will be of great importance to promoting the stability, security and economic and social development of the nation. We therefore encourage the international community to continue supporting the people and Government of Afghanistan by providing resources and building capacity to promote their development. It is to be noted that improving the security situation will favourably affect the country's political, economic and social dynamics.

Drug trafficking continues to pose serious threats to peace and stability in Afghanistan. The Taliban uses illegal narcotics trafficking to fund its terrorist activities. As indicated in the report, poppy cultivation and production in the country have increased, with the low rate of crop eradication being a most disturbing element, due to heavy fighting, particularly in the province of Helmand. In that regard, we welcome the joint efforts of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, to forge a common front against this problem in the framework of regional cooperation. We reiterate that the effective fight against drugs requires international cooperation, including that of neighbouring countries, to prevent, combat and eliminate this scourge.

Finally, we encourage the Government of Afghanistan to pursue its efforts for a comprehensive and inclusive political process leading to the establishment of a firm and lasting peace, to enhance its control over all its territory and resources, and to strengthen the State and its institutions on behalf of its people, who have suffered war and violence for so many years.

The President: The representative of Afghanistan has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): I just want to make two brief points.

First, on behalf of my Government, I wish to officially thank the Security Council for adopting the very timely presidential statement S/PRST/2016/14, expressing its unanimous support. Secondly, let me thank the Foreign Minister of New Zealand, His Excellency Mr. Murray McCully, for presiding over today's meeting on Afghanistan. New Zealand is a true-blue friend of Afghanistan, and I am sure that it was in the spirit of such friendship that Minister McCully spoke so frankly in his statement.

However, with all due respect, the debate over governance in Kabul is an internal matter for Afghanistan, and we expect our friends and partners around the world to respect that and understand their limitations when it comes to the sovereignty of other countries, just as we respect the sovereignty of New Zealand and all other countries around the world. The debate in Kabul is for the sake of the political stability of Afghanistan, of which our international partners should be proud. We will have to address anything that could harm the political stability of Afghanistan.

Our two national leaders at the head of the Government proved themselves two years ago when, after a very lengthy marathon election, they came together and showed a great deal of statesmanship in putting the National Unity Government together. Of course, as we said from the start, this has not been an easy way; there is a troubled way ahead of us, but we must make it work. And the only way to make it work is to address the issues rather than ignore them. That is exactly what we are doing.

The President: I shall now make a further statement in my capacity of Foreign Minister of New Zealand.

I thank the representative of Afghanistan for his frank remark in response to my statement. New Zealand has indeed been a true friend of Afghanistan over 10 years of effort and lives lost in a very difficult period. The issue of the stability of the Government of Afghanistan is fundamental to the success of the international effort, and we look forward to working with Afghanistan to make things as strong as possible both for the international community and for the Government of Afghanistan.

I resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): My country aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union, and supports the statement to be made by the representative of the Netherlands as part of our cooperation related to the upcoming split term in the Security Council. We are currently defining our cooperation around shared goals and values in the firm belief that this agreement sends a positive political message of cooperation to tackle common challenges, of which the situation in Afghanistan is one.

I would like to begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his thorough report on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2016/768) and by expressing our appreciation for the action of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in this complex scenario. We offer a warm welcome to the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

The challenges Afghanistan is facing remain daunting. On the security front, the persistent increase in the number of civilian victims of the conflict is cause for great concern, and the data on children who have died or been injured is particularly alarming. The already serious humanitarian situation has further deteriorated due to the increase in the number of internally displaced persons. We condemn most firmly the terrorist attacks that continue to plague the country, such as those in Kabul in recent weeks. In the face of such unjustifiable and indiscriminate acts of violence, Italy reiterates its full support for and recognition of the efforts of the Afghan Government to combat terrorism and the actions of violent armed groups and to ensure peace and stability for the country. Against that background, on the occasion of the NATO Summit held in Warsaw in July, together with its partners in the Alliance, Italy decided to continue its active engagement in the Resolute Support Mission as a framework nation, assisting the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces to enhance their capabilities.

The past months have not seen encouraging developments towards a possible peace process, which nonetheless remains the main objective to bring an end to the violence in the country. Efforts to establish the conditions that could lead to an Afghan-led peace process must therefore be renewed. To that end, close and constructive cooperation among the countries of the region is essential. We hope that such cooperation will be based on the understanding that fighting terrorism and those who aim to violently to destabilize Afghanistan is in the common interests, as a peaceful and stable Afghanistan is essential for the stability of the entire region.

Another basic challenge for Afghanistan is that of strengthening its institutions and consolidating economic and social development. The upcoming Brussels Conference will be a key moment in the country's journey to self-sufficiency; to lower its dependency on international aid; to expand the progress achieved in the past 15 years in consolidating democracy, social development, access to health care

and the promotion of the rights of women and girls; and to address the underlying causes of Afghan migration flows, in particular towards Europe, while helping to improve security conditions. We are aware that, in order to achieve those ambitious goals, the financial support of the international community is decisive. Likewise, the achievement of the goals requires the utmost determination on the part of Afghanistan in pursuing the domestic reforms already initiated in that direction.

We appreciate the commitment of the Afghan authorities in that regard, as well as the programmes of action that relate to the Afghan National Peace and Development Framework and the updated goals of the Self Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework, which will be presented in Brussels. In the spirit of the principles of mutual commitment and mutual accountability, which support the partnership between Afghanistan and the international community, it is important that those reform plans be implemented concretely and effectively. That is what the donor countries are asking in order to confirm their assistance, but it is above all also what the Afghan people are asking for.

In the wake of the positive results achieved so far, it is essential that further concrete and measurable progress be reached in crucial sectors, such as the fight against corruption, human rights, the promotion of the rights of women and their full empowerment throughout society. To that end, close internal cohesion within the Government and effective teamwork are absolute prerequisites. We therefore hope that the differences that have recently emerged within the Government will be overcome, whilre renewing the spirit of national unity at its foundation in the greater interests of the country and its people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2016/768) and congratulate Special Representative Yamamoto on his appointment.

The report of the Secretary-General paints a bleak and troubling picture of the security, political and economic situation in Afghanistan. We support the Secretary-General's call on the Afghan leadership to demonstrate a spirit of cooperation to achieve a meaningful agreement on the path forward for the benefit of the Afghan people. The unity of the Afghan Government is imperative in order for it to effectively address the multiple challenges that it faces.

The upcoming Conference in Brussels will be another opportunity for the international community to signal its sustained support to peace and development in Afghanistan. Pakistan will continue to support international efforts for the stability and economic development of Afgha..istan. But external support, although critical, cannot be a substitute for internal political stability. Among otner factors, that is contingent upon the successful implementation of reforms by the Afghan Government and the active promotion of peace and reconciliation.

The security situation in Afghanistan has continued to deteriorate with the escalation in violence and a significant increase in civilian casualties. That is a cause of great concern not just for Afghanistan's neighbours, but also for the entire international community.

The international community is unanimous in its view that sustainable peace is achievable only through a negotiated end to the war. Fifteen years of war waged by the the world's most powerful forces could not yield a military solution; a military solution is even more unlikely now. Nor should anyone expect that Pakistan will fight Afghanistan's war on its soil. Unfortunately, the Afghan parties themselves appear to have moved away from the international consensus that peace can be achieved only through negotiations. Neither side appears willing to talk, except on their own terms. Meanwhile, new actors are being introduced into the conflict. A dialogue between Kabul and the Afghan Taliban remains the only way to end Afghanistan's long night of suffering. Pakistan is willing to help in reviving the dialogue, as we did in June 2015, at President Ashraf Ghani's request. But that requires efforts by all four members of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process — namely, Afghanistan, the United States, China and Pakistan. This mechanism remains an important vehicle to assist an Aghan-led and owned peace process.

Both sides are now threatened by the rise of Da'esh in Afghanistan. Several elements of what is known as the Pakastani Taliban — or the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) — have declared their allegiance or integration with Da'esh. It is therefore strange that some of TTP elements, allied with Da'esh, continue to enjoy the backing of Aghanistan's intelligence agency. Unless

peace is restored in Afghanistan, it risks emerging again as a central source of global terrorism.

My country has paid an onerous price for almost four decades of strife and conflict in Afghanistan. Pakistan continues to play host to the largest protracted presence of refugees anywhere in the world. Apart from Afghanistan itself, it is Pakistan that stands to gain the most from the restoration of peace across our western border. Pakistan's counter-terrorism campaign — the largest and most effective in the world, deploying a 180,000-strong force — has turned the tide of terrorism in the country. Unfortunately, though, we continue to encounter threats from TTP elements and its backers from across the border.

We call upon Kabul to ensure that its territory is not used by anyone to foment terrorism in Pakistan. To prevent cross-border attacks, Pakistan will fence extended parts of the border. If the Afghan seeks an end to such cross-border terrorism, it should support such fencing and strict controls at the international border. We will work with the Afghan Government through the recently constituted high-level consultation mechanism to address border and other concerns.

The path to peace in Afghanistan is arduous but achievable. However, it is up to the Afghan parties themselves to acknowledge that there is no alternative path to peace other than through unconditional dialogue and making necessary, although difficult, compromises to arrive at a negotiated settlement. The people of Afghanistan deserve no less.

The peoples of Pakistan and Afghanistan enjoy age-old bonds of kinship, faith and a shared history. Pakistan has offered unprecedented hospitality and support to the Afghan people over the past several decades of their travail and tragedy provoked by foreign military interventions. We have delayed sending back Afghan refugees yet again. We allow the transit of Afghan goods through our ports and over our roads. We also have displayed extreme forebearance in the face of unwarranted accusations from certain quarters in Kabul. We urge the Afghan Government to halt its belligerent rhetoric. That is in the long-term interests of its country and its people, as well as of the entire region. We stand committed to work with the Afghan Government for the improvement of this relationship on the basis of shared interests and values, and for the mutual benefit of our two peoples.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Thoms (Germany): Let me begin by thanking Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing. I wish him every success in his important posting at the helm of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and would like to reassure him of our full support.

Germany aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

While Afghanistan has made considerable progress in many areas over recent years, the security, and consequently the economic, situation remain extremely challenging. It is a matter of concern that the number of civilian casualties is on the rise. As the Secretary-General points out in his report (S/2016/768), the number of armed clashes rose by approximately 15 per cent, and the number of casualties among children increased by 18 per cent. The protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict is paramount under international humanitarian law. We welcome the Government's national policy on civilian casualty mitigation, which needs to be fully implemented.

It is important that the international community continue to give its full attention to the situation in Afghanistan. The Brussels Conference on Afghanistan will be a chance for the international community to once more underline its political and financial support for Afghanistan, while at the same time allowing the Afghan Government to present its achievements and the remaining challenges in implementing its reform agenda.

Afghanistan is Germany's single largest engagement in a foreign country, both in civilian and military terms, and we are conscious of the resulting responsibilities. Germany is committed to maintaining its support for Afghanistan. However, it is crucial that inclusive, effective and reform-oriented governance remain a priority beyond Brussels. This includes progress on electoral reforms to pave the way to parliamentary and district council elections. Also, economic reforms are of the utmost importance to counter slaw economic growth. The accession of Afghanistan to the World Trade Organization is an encouraging sign in this respect.

We encourage the Afghan Government to maintain its efforts to fight corruption and to implement the existing strategies in a transparent manner. Visible

progress in fighting corruption is a strong argument for justifying the exceptional level of donor support to Afghanistan. Development and security go hand in hand. In the long run, a peace and reconciliation process is the only way to long-term stability in Afghanistan and the region. Such a process can succeed only if it enjoys the united backing of all key stakeholders in the region and beyond.

Germany joins all of Afghanistan's friends and partners in a sending the clear message that we remain committed to supporting Afghanistan, in close cooperation with the Afghan Government and our international partners.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): Let me start by joining others in welcoming Mr Tadamichi Yamamoto and thanking him for his first briefing as Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

The security situation across Afghanistan remains challenging. Recent violent attacks in Kabul, deliberately targeting Afghanistan's civilian population, are particularly concerning. We condemn the brutal tactics used by insurgent groups. In the face of these attacks, the Afghan people and security forces continue to demonstrate courage and resilience. Australia reaffirms its commitment to assisting Afghanistan in defending its people against the insurgency. We support the efforts of President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah to maintain the National Unity Government. Constructive working relationships and a shared vision across all levels of Government are key to managing Afghanistan's security and economic interests.

Australia supports United Nations efforts to assist returning refugees and internally displaced persons in a safe, orderly and dignified manner. We encourage Afghanistan's neighbours to support a manageable flow of returnees, enabling the Government of Afghanistan to respond effectively, particularly in the lead-up to winter.

This year, the international community continues to rally its support for Afghanistan with two major summits. The Warsaw Summit in July demonstrated ongoing international support for Afghanistan's security needs. Australia, alongside international partners, reaffirmed our commitment to Afghanistan. Together, we agreed to continue our support for Afghanistan's security forces, formalizing our commitment to NATO's Resolute Support Mission beyond 2016 and to providing sustainment funding at current levels through to 2020. The international community also welcomed President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah's commitment to reforming at Warsaw. We look forward to the presentation of the Government's national development strategy at the Brussels Conference next month, and to working with Afghanistan to implement these plans following the Conference.

At Brussels, the international community will focus on future support for Afghanistan's development. Australia recognizes Afghanistan's efforts in pushing forward key national reforms in difficult circumstances, and in particular we support its emphasis on economic growth, revenue mobilization, employment and countering corruption. We also welcome the Government of Afghanistan's support for gender equality, including steps towards implementing the national action plan on women and peace and security and the elimination of violence against women.

But huge challenges remain to ensuring that reforms made by the Government are felt by ordinary Afghans. We look forward to discussing the Government of Afghanistan's plans for development and addressing the needs of the Afghan population, including poverty reduction, basic service delivery, job creation and inclusive development.

In conclusion, international efforts in Afghanistan are supported by a strong United Nations presence, and Australia values the role that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan plays in guiding and coordinating international support.

The President: I give the floor to Ms. Adamson.

Ms. Adamson: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2016/768). I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing.

Let me start by reiterating our full support for the continuing important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and all the United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people and in coordinating the international community's assistance.

Progress in Afghanistan in recent years has been remarkable but uneven, and requires consolidation in many areas. The recent political tensions amid the country's security and economic challenges highlight a persistent fragility. Political stability and predictability are essential. Preparations for the Brussels Conference require confidence that there is a stable political way forward well beyond October, with a need to compromise and to make concessions wherever necessary to ensure a viable and durable solution. This calls ever more for a long-term perspective and a realistic approach that acknowledges the huge challenges ahead of us. It calls for the sustained and predictable support of the international community, based on mutual accountability principles.

We are collectively committed and contributing to the stabilization of the region — in the fight against terrorism, against the illegal economy and narcotics production, as well as in trying to alleviate migratory pressures, which represent an increasingly growing challenge for neighbours near and far, including Europe. In this context, allow me to say that we deeply deplore the high number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan, which, according to the latest United Nations report, are at record levels. Improving security remains the single most important factor for stability and development in Afghanistan. Therefore, we welcome the commitments made at the NATO Warsaw Summit in July in support of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces.

Looking ahead, we are nowentering the final phase of organizing, together with the Afghan Government the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, which will follow three strands: substantial progress in Afghan State- and institution-building by effectively implementing the reforms of the National Unity Government; international support near or at current levels up to 2020, and increasing the effectiveness of aid in support of the new Afghan development framework; and regional support for a political process oriented towards stabilization, peace and cross-border economic cooperation.

We are confident that, by the time of the Brussels Conference, we will come to a joint vision and development framework for the coming years, on the basis of credible implementation plans. Following the recent meeting of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board in Kabul, the European Union and its member States welcomed the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework. This is a strategic document that defines future development priorities and guides Government and donors' development programming. Cross-government buy-in, effective implementation arrangements and timely results of this ambitious reform programme will determine its success, also in the eyes of the Afghan population.

The finalization of the new national priority programmes is one important element in this regard, as is an agreement on a new annex to the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework that defines clear progress indicators for the coming years. These policy documents pave the way for tangible progress in terms of poverty reduction and the provision of basic services and public goods. Mutual accountability is the driving principle. Continued exceptional but gradually declining financial support over the coming years will depend on such progress, including the necessary institution-building to maintain a stable society based on the rule of law and the consolidation of Afghanistan's democratic institutions, as well as a perspective for the already delayed parliamentary elections.

The fight against corruption remains a critical challenge, and effective measures leading to actual results are of paramount importance, as is the establishment of a reliable rule-of-law framework which includes civilian policing and a functioning justice system. They are a precondition for the respect, protection and promotion of human rights, in particular women's and children's rights.

On behalf of the European Union and its member States, I would like also to reiterate that joint State-building and development efforts in Afghanistan can be sustained only if they are built on reinforced regional cooperation. Development and security are interconnected challenges for Afghanistan's State-building process and need to be underpinned by genuine political support at the regional level. This also includes the increasing humanitarian challenges we face with the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons in Afghanistan and the neighbouring countries, notably Pakistan and Iran. We need to address together the growing pressure of migration.

Taking all three strands together, the Afghan reform agenda, a new development partnership and a new regional dynamic, a successful Brussels Conference will send the signal of a renewed and stronger partnership. A high level of attendance and clear signals for continued extraordinary support for Afghanistan will be important to convey a clear message that calls for tangible progress on the ground; a strong signal for economic reforms and inclusive growth, job creation and a much more business-friendly environment; a firm commitment to political stability; and a new dynamic towards peace.

Let me conclude by thanking Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto for his outstanding work in the past two years as Deputy Special Representative and by congratulating him on his new position. We wish him all the best for the challenging tasks that lie ahead of him. We look forward to continued cooperation with Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Lal (India): I thank you, Madam President, for having organized this debate. We thank the Secretary-General's Special Representative in Afghanistan, Ambassador Yamamoto, for his briefing and wish him well in his endeavours for peace in Afghanistan. We also thank the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, for his important statement.

We offer our sincere condolences at the loss of lives and destruction of property in several recent terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, which killed and maimed hundreds of innocent people. While the Taliban's increased attacks and military gains in the country have been resisted by the Afghan security forces, these attacks have only gone up in the last few months, a trend which cannot be explained as simply a peak in the fighting season. The current efforts made by the international community to assist Afghanistan have clearly not been adequate.

We have noted the flash appeal issued by the United Nations to assist Afghanistan in managing and minimizing the huge humanitarian costs that an expected mass migration of more than 1 million people in a short period will entail in the midst of the increasing violence. The Security Council needs to find the means to reverse the deteriorating security situation so that the gains made by the people of Afghanistan in the last 15 years do not wither away.

Groups and individuals that perpetrate violence against the people and the Government of Afghanistan must not be allowed safe havens in Afghanistan's neighbourhood. We note that Afghanistan, along with the Resolute Support Force, has taken steps to eliminate the terrorist leaders who were operating from those parts of Afghan territory controlled by the Taliban and other terrorist groups. While the Afghanistan Government has made efforts to combat terrorism, others have callously looked the other way when Afghanistan is targeted by the Taliban, the Haqqani network, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, Al-Qaida, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed.

The effective implementation of the Security Council sanctions regime, including that established pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015), concerning the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, as well as that established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), on the Taliban, is absolutely essential for it to serve as a strong deterrent to the listed entities and individuals.

The fact that the leader of the Taliban, a proscribed entity, is not yet designated a terrorist individual remains a mystery to us. Can we know the rationale for such an approach? Is it now the thinking that leaders of proscribed entities will not be held accountable for the deeds of the listed groups that they head? Is this how we intend to address one of the most serious threats to international peace and security?

Or will the response to our queries be a deafening silence, as was the case when the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), which deals with issues relating to Afghanistan, met last month, on 8 August? We are unaware of what was discussed and what was the outcome of these discussions. Are Member States entitled to know what this Committee, which acts on their behalf, considers and decides upon on for all of us? This appears to be one more instance of the secrecy practiced in the subterranean universe of the Security Council, which has now enshrined the principles of anonymity and unanimity to ensure a lack of accountability to Member States.

Afghanistan has India's full support in strengthening its defence capabilities and in preserving its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, which is essential for the stability of the region.

India remains strongly committed to Afghanistan. The Prime Minister of India has conveyed to the President of Afghanistan, during his ongoing visit to India, our offer of an allocation of a further sum of $1 billion for the requirements of Afghanistan for capacity-building in spheres including education, health care, agriculture, skill development, the empowerment of women, energy, infrastructure and the strengthening of democratic institutions. India is proud, privileged and honoured that its engagement in Afghanistan, through our development partnership, has been a harbinger of hope and predictability, as conveyed by President Ghani to Prime Minister Modi earlier today.

We believe that the path to reconciliation in Afghanistan should be through a process that is owned and led by Afghanistan, reflecting the aspirations of the people of Afghanistan. India will continue to engage with the international community to assist the Government of Afghanistan in all possible ways in this regard.

We applaud the role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in providing assistance for Afghanistan in various sectors in this crucial transformation decade.

I would like to conclude by reiterating what Prime Minister Modi told President Ghani: "The 1.25 billion people of India stand with their Afghan brothers and sisters". India reposes its full faith in the brave and resilient people of Afghanistan and the National Unity Government for a peaceful, prosperous, stable, unified, sovereign and democratic Afghanistan as a land bridge between West, Central and South Asia.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to express my appreciation to New Zealand for having organized this debate on the situation in Afghanistan. My thanks also go to the Ambassador of Afghanistan for his statement. I would like to welcome and thank Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his briefing and for presenting the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/768).

Unfortunately, security and instability remain the major challenges for Afghanistan. The report refers to a 24 per cent increase in the number of armed clashes compared with the same period last year, while last year was reported as the highest number recorded since 2001 in terms of the intensity of armed clashes. This continuing deterioration of the security situation in the country indicates that Afghanistan and the region are no safer more than a decade after its invasion.

On peace talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban, uncertainty prevails as concerns any prospect of making peace with them. Iran reiterates its support for any Afghan-led peace process; at the same time, we condemn all violent attacks committed by the Taliban and all other terrorist groups as well as any cooperation with them, since we believe that this will encourage them in their odious behaviour and thus be counterproductive to establishing peace in Afghanistan.

In my previous statement in June (see S/PV.7722), I warned about the emergence of Da'esh and its offshoots in Afghanistan. During the same period, we witnessed the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP) claiming responsibility for the terrorist attack against a demonstration by ethnic Hazaras on 23 July, which was the deadliest single incident recorded by the United Nations in Afghanistan since 2001. That is just another indication of the threat. ISIL-KP, along with a range of other terrorist and extremist groups, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, in the north, and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, appears as an emerging security threat in Afghanistan. Today, the Afghan National Unity Government is at the forefront of combating terrorism, but there is an increased need for the international community to provide sustained support to the Government in its fight against terrorism and extremism, as well as to address its security, economic and political challenges.

Strengthening our regional cooperation with Afghanistan is a priority and a major pathway to consolidating peace and economic growth in the region. During the past decade, Iran has spent millions of dollars to help Afghanistan to complete nearly 300 projects in areas ranging from infrastructure to training and capacity-building in human resources, especially through the hundreds of scholarships we offer each year.

Afghanistan and Iran continue to cooperate in those areas, following the 23 May trilateral agreement with India focused on the Iranian port of Chabahar. Coordination meetings at the level of the Governors of the border provinces were held on 25 and 26 July to discuss security and new trade opportunities involving the port. The Afghan Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs visited Tehran on 3 August for discussions on trade,

infrastructure and the presence of Afghan nationals in Iran, and the Afghan National Security Adviser visited Iran on 6 and 7 August to discuss border security and countering violent extremism. The fifth meeting of the Afghanistan-Iran Joint Economic Commission was held on 10 August in Tehran, following a four-year interval. Iran and Afghanistan are also committed to increasing their connectivity with emphasis on the Khaf-Herat railway, a 78-mile railroad project in Farah, and a second bridge over the Hirmand River.

Iran continues to provide its full support for the promotion of security, stability and comprehensive and sustainable development in Afghanistan, as we consider security in Afghanistan to be the security of our own borders and of the region as a whole. We support UNAMA and United Nations agencies in their efforts to provide development and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan through the Organization's genuine commitment to a sustained partnership with the country, as set forth in final report of the Tripartite Review Commission on the United Nations in Afghanistan. The UNAMA mandate and its good offices should be used to strengthen national institutions and capacities in priority areas, as requested by the Government.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): In honour of New Zealand's presidency of the Security Council, I would like to use the Maori greeting "Kia Ora" to first address you, Madam President.

I align myself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union a few moments ago. However, I would like to underline the following.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands fully supports the statement made on behalf of Italy, also as part of our cooperation related to the upcoming split term in the Security Council. As my Italian colleague just emphasized, we are currently defining our cooperation around shared goals and values in the firm belief that this agreement sends a positive political message of cooperation to tackle common challenges here at the United Nations.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his detailed and thorough report (S/2016/768). I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing. I wish him well in his new position. I would also like to thank my good friend, Permanent Representative Saikal, for his statement.

Today I will focus on three issues, namely, reconciliation and security, the Brussels Conference, and gender issues.

In our view, issues of peace and reconciliation are of paramount importance. We would highly welcome the swift signing of an agreement between the High Peace Council and the Hezb-i-Islami as an encouragement for other insurgent groups to engage in serious peace talks. The need for peace and reconciliation is underlined by the security situation in Afghanistan, as has been mentioned by many of our colleagues. The report of the Secretary-General states that the overall security situation has deteriorated since the beginning of the year, and it is the people of Afghanistan who have borne the brunt of violence and terrible atrocities committed by the Taliban and other armed groups.

Civilian casualties have increased are currently at the highest level since 2009, according the UNAMA midyear report. That has resulted in many internally displaced persons and refugees, as our Australian colleague just mentioned, and increasing pressure on migration, including through Europe. The intense fighting that took place in Tarin Kowt last week, which is a place of particular concern for the Dutch because we serve there, shows the fragility of the region and, in particular, its security situation. In addition, in Kabul last week, 41 innocent people were killed and more than 100 were wounded in the two major attacks that took place there. Our thoughts and condolences go to the victims and their families.

In our view, those developments demonstrate the urgent need to improve security for ordinary Afghan citizens. We commend the Afghan special forces and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces for their competent and professional response in countering the Taliban and other insurgents. The international community, including the Kingdom of the Netherlands, has supported those forces for over a decade now, and we will continue to do so, as was announced in Warsaw.

We look forward to the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, at which the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, Ms. Ploumen, will participate. We believe the Conference will be an important moment where the international community will renew, as it should, its commitment to the Afghan people.

We commend the Afghan National Unity Government for pursuing an ambitious reform agenda, especially with regard to tackling corruption and fostering regional stability and economic growth. All these issues require stability and the long-term commitment of both the Afghan Government and the international community. We now urge the Government to implement those ambitious plans without further delay.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework, which clearly demonstrates the resolve of the Afghan Government with regard to Afghanistan's near future. We look forward to seeing concrete action to implement the plan in line with the commitments under the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework.

With regard to gender issues, much progress has been achieved so far. Millions of women and children in Afghanistan now have access to basic services, such as education and health care. Women and girls are actively taking part in social life, and Afghanistan has experienced a sharp increase in girls enrolling in school. Let us not forget that this was unthinkable during Taliban rule.

At the same time, Afghanistan still faces many challenges in that context. The position of women remains precarious. Accordingly, we welcome the adoption of the Afghan national action plan on women and peace and security. The Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to cooperate with the Afghan Government and civil society partners to expedite the implementation of the plan. Women are the cornerstone of society. Women need to play a crucial role in rebuilding the country. Women are crucial for peace and for the long-term sustainable development of Afghanistan.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of the Netherlands has been an enduring partner of Afghanistan. We have contributed significantly in the areas of peace, justice and development. We remain committed to supporting Afghanistan throughout the transformation decade — one of ever-greater Afghan ownership and Afghan leadership. In this spirit of partnership, the Afghan people can count on us standing by their side.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Blanchard (Canada): I am grateful for this opportunity to address the Security Council. Canada would like to thank the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for its ongoing crucial work in Afghanistan, and welcomes the Secretary-General's latest report on it to the Council (S/2016/768).

I would like to proudly state that Canada has had an active development presence in Afghanistan for decades, and we remain committed to helping it achieve its development goals. As testimony to our commitment, Prime Minister Trudeau recently announced Canada's contribution to the next three years of Afghanistan's transformation decade. Between 2017 and 2020, Canada will provide $465 million, consisting of $195 million for security and $270 million for development assistance.

I would first like to emphasize that no development can be achieved without the active and substantive participation of all members of society, including women and girls. For that reason, Canada takes an approach favouring women's and girls' rights first in all of our health, education and human rights programming in Afghanistan. The path to a prosperous and stable Afghanistan is through empowering Afghan women and ensuring that their voices are heard and their rights protected. We are encouraged by the positive steps that Afghanistan has made in recent years to promote and protect women's rights, including strengthening their legal protection from violence, creating greater educational opportunities and increasing their inclusion in public and political life. But more must be done, and it must be done more rapidly. We believe that such advances for Afghanistan's women and girls will help to advance the rights, security, and empowerment of all Afghans.

(*spoke in French*)

Secondly, Canada is concerned about the deteriorating security levels in Afghanistan over the past year. The Afghan security forces continue to deal with considerable challenges from an armed insurgency that is active across much of the country. Canada remains committed to supporting the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and continues to emphasize the importance of increasing the number of women recruited into its ranks and ensuring the protection of women and children.

Thirdly, Canada fully supports an Afghan-led peace and reconciliation process and calls on the Taliban to come to the table to negotiate. It is vital to ensure that

the peace process includes meaningful participation by Afghan women. Canada's embassy in Kabul has been working very closely with the Afghan Government to make this happen through the appointment of strong, capable Afghan women to the High Peace Council. We thank the Government of Afghanistan for their commitment to the issue and reaffirm our desire to see a peace that can benefit the entire population.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada stands with the Afghan people as they strive for a more secure and prosperous future. We support the Afghan Government and its people in the face of challenging circumstances, and welcome Afghanistan's efforts to counter an escalating insurgency, broker peace, tackle corruption and much-needed reforms and pursue economic and social development. Those are tough challenges. But Canada is committed to supporting Afghanistan in its continued quest for stability, accountability and self-reliance.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2016/768), Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing and Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal for his statement. I would also like to express our appreciation for the work carried out by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in coordinating the international community's support for Afghanistan.

As we leave behind the NATO Warsaw Summit and move towards the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, we are indeed at a critical time. We were pleased to see that the international community will continue with its security and development assistance to Afghanistan. We also welcome the dedication and determination of the Government, security forces and people of Afghanistan and their genuine efforts to overcome the many challenges they face.

As the Secretary-General's report shows, the security situation in Afghanistan remains fragile. The Afghan security forces' fighting capabilities and coordination skills are improving in the light of lessons learned. However, the insurgents are improving their techniques, too, and they remain a source of serious concern. In that regard, continued international support is vital. At the same time, the peace and reconciliation process should also continue to be Afghan-owned and -led. It is crucial to convince the Taliban to come to the negotiating table. We support the work of several mechanisms that have been established in various formats to coordinate efforts in that direction and stand ready to contribute to them.

In that understanding, we will continue our bilateral assistance to Afghanistan in the areas of security and development and our contributions to NATO as a framework nation, as well as making genuine contributions to the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. In Ankara in June, as the co-leader country of the Counter-terrorism Confidence Building Measures within the Process, Turkey organized a course in critical infrastructure protection from terrorist attacks. We will soon finalize the preparations for two more events, on radicalization and the financial aspects of combating terrorism, towards the end of this year.

Before concluding, I would like to emphasize that Turkey will continue to stand by our Afghan brothers as long as our help is needed.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7772

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7772nd meeting

Thursday, 15 September 2016, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. McCully/Mr. Van Bohemen	(New Zealand)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gimolieca
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Arcia Vivas

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and give him the floor.

The Secretary-General: I should like to thank Foreign Minister McCully for organizing this meeting at a cruciall important time. Allow me to begin by wishing all Muslims who celebrated this week Eid Adha Mubarak.

I also want to reiterate my hope for the swift and full recovery of former Israeli President Shimon Peres, who has been tireless in seeking peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Twenty-three years ago, almost to the day, the first Oslo Accord was signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Unfortunately, we are further than ever from its goals. The two-State solution is at risk of being replaced by a one-State reality of perpetual violence and occupation. Despite warnings by the international community and the region, leaders on both sides have failed to take the difficult steps needed for peace.

Just yesterday, militants in Gaza fired yet another rocket into Israel, which I condemn. Israel fired four missiles at targets in Gaza in response. Once again, I reiterate that such attacks and the response they elicit do not serve the cause of peace. In the past two weeks alone, plans have been advanced for yet another 463 housing units in four settlements in Area C of the occupied West Bank. Official Israeli data shows that the second quarter of 2016 had the highest number of construction starts in three years. The decades-long policy that has settled more than 500,000 Israelis in Palestinian territory is diametrically opposed to the creation of a Palestinian State.

Regrettably, the reporting period also saw the continuation of statements by both sides that only perpetuate an environment of mistrust. I am disturbed by a recent statement by Israel's Prime Minister portraying those who oppose settlement expansion as supporters of ethnic cleansing. This is unacceptable and outrageous. Let me be absolutely clear — settlements are illegal under international law. The occupation, stifling and oppressive, must end. The international community, including the Security Council and the Middle East Quartet, universally views the expansion of settlements as an obstacle to peace.

I continue to be appalled that Palestinian parties choose to praise despicable acts, such as the 1972 terrorist attack against Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics. The glorification of terror is disgraceful and the Palestinian leadership must put an end to it.

As Palestinians prepare for the first local elections in over 10 years, we see increasing threats to the electoral process and the credibility of elected institutions, including politically motivated attacks and a growing number of questionable rulings. I am particularly concerned by last week's decision of the Palestinian High Court to suspend all preparations while deliberations continue on a petition to cancel elections. Local elections in the West Bank and Gaza, if held in line with international standards, could provide an important renewal of Palestinian democracy and a first step towards advancing national unity. Regional efforts to encourage reconciliation and strengthen moderate political forces can also play a positive role.

Turning to Gaza, there has been progress in the two years since the 2014 ceasefire. Houses, hospitals, schools and critical infrastructure have been repaired thanks to generous donors and good cooperation among Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations. At the same time, 65,000 people remain displaced. More assistance is needed to rebuild nearly 5,000 destroyed houses. More coordination is required to accelerate ongoing reconstruction. Since 2014, the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism has facilitated the entry of more than 1.5 million tons of construction material and helped significantly to boost imports into Gaza, positively impacting the private sector.

Israel has legitimate security concerns with regard to the smuggling or seizure of materials. Nevertheless, the mechanism is closely monitored and all sides continue to ensure that appropriate controls are in place for aid to reach its intended recipients. I encourage Israel and the Palestinian Authority to continue their cooperation with the United Nations and facilitate the

import of reconstruction materials that are so vital to rebuilding people's lives, while ensuring that materials are not diverted for military use.

Apart from reconstruction, Gaza's humanitarian needs run deep. More than 1.3 million of its 1.9 million people need of assistance. Continued humanitarian access and funding services to the Palestinian population in Gaza remain critical. In this dire context, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to face serious financial challenges. I appeal to Member States for their generosity to ensure that UNRWA can carry out its activities effectively and in a predictable manner.

Looking at the broader situation, Gaza remains under closures and is a ticking time bomb. Instability and the risk of violent escalation are ever-present. The continued arms build-up and militant activities of Hamas and other radical groups keep both sides of the border in a state of constant alert. The continued humanitarian deprivations of Gaza's nearly 2 million residents smother dreams and ambitions, and feed instability and extremism.

The corrosive Palestinian political divide worsens the humanitarian situation and stifles development, and the absence of a Government of national unity, espousing the principles upon which to build peace, inhibits the realization of an end to the occupation and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian State. In its July report (S/2016/595, annex), the Quartet highlighted these complex political, security and socioeconomic dynamics in Gaza as one of the negative trends severely undermining hopes for peace. Lasting progress in Gaza can be realized only on the basis of Palestinian unity, an end to the illicit arms build-up and militant activities, and a full lifting of movement and access restrictions in line with resolution 1860 (2009).

Turning to the Golan, I remain concerned by the continued breaches of the ceasefire line and by fighting in the areas of separation and limitation. These developments undermine the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement and jeopardize the ceasefire between Israel and Syria. In particular, recent fire from the Syrian Arab Armed Forces impacted the Israeli-occupied Golan. On both occasions, the Israel Defense Forces responded with an airstrike. I call on Israel and Syria to abide by the terms of the Disengagement Agreement and exercise maximum restraint.

In a matter of days, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians will meet here in New York. I encourage both sides to focus on positive policy shifts, consistent with the transition to greater Palestinian civil authority in Area C, contemplated by prior agreements. To this end, I welcome the parties' recent agreement on outstanding electricity debts and the creation of a new energy market, which will transfer authority to the Palestinian Government for the management of energy infrastructure. Such steps, echoing the intentions of Oslo, are critical to the viability of a future Palestinian State.

At the same time, international stakeholders must continue to work towards a negotiated end to the occupation, now entering its 50th year, and the establishment of a viable, democratic Palestine living in peace with Israel, each respecting the other's historic and religious connections to this holy land. Building on its report, the Quartet will continue its role to promote consensus to that end.

I wish to thank my Special Coordinator, Nickolay Mladenov, for his unwavering commitment and continued engagement with the parties in what remains a challenging context. For the sake of regional and indeed global peace, we must intensify our efforts to encourage the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to take the difficult steps to change the destructive trajectory currently leading us towards a one-State reality.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand.

It is deeply disappointing to have to acknowledge that the comments I am about to make and that others will make today could have been made with equal force and relevance at any time in the two and a half years since negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians were suspended. We all express dismay and outrage about the violence affecting ordinary Israelis and Palestinians, and yet innocent lives continue to be lost. We all condemn settlements, and yet they continue to expand. We repeatedly encourage both sides to compromise and find a road to peace, and yet angry rhetoric and incitement prevail. The international community does what it can to support the parties in resuming negotiations, and yet despite the best efforts of a range of players we are no closer to a solution. We

all proclaim our firm commitment to the two-State solution as the only viable option, and yet the Council remains a spectator as the two-State solution erodes. There have been some positive developments, such as this week's agreement between Israel and the pauth to resolve the Palestinians' debt to the Israel Electricity Corporation, but the picture painted by the Secretary-General in his briefing should alarm us all.

New Zealand regards itself as a friend of both Israelis and Palestinians. We are not a part of that troubled region. We have no baggage or vested interests. We try hard to bring a fair and balanced perspective to this conplex and difficult topic. Today we say to both parties that they are falling seriously short of the expectations of the international community and that it is time for them to step back and think again about what they need to do to keep the prospect for a negotiated two-State solution alive. And it is time that the Security Council and the international community told them so and resolve to take practical steps to help them on their way.

Recent developments with respect to Israeli settlements are of particular concern. The announcement, on 31 August, of approvals for a further 463 housing units on the West Bank, including 284 new units, is at odds with Israel's stated commitment to talk with the Palestinians and reach an agreement. So far this year, plans for 2,623 settlement units have been advanced, including the retrospective legalization of 756 units. No amount of spin can hide the fact that those actions are a violation of Israel's international obligations and that they have profoundly negative implications for the peace process.

The Palestinian side, too, has fallen short of the expectations we should all have. Violence against Israeli citizens continues to be condoned. The first local elections in a decade — a chance to mend faces and renew mandates — seem to have been postponed. Reconciliation has been placed on the back burner. And rockets from Gaza continue to target Israeli towns and cities.

The result of those developments is that the two-State solution — the vision and goal of the Security Council for nearly 50 years — is close to becoming a shattered dream. For those in Israel who think that that does not matter, who think that time is their friend, I urge them to think again. If the prospect of a two-State solution is shattered by the negative trajectory of events, international attention will shift to the two standards of citizenship that exist in the single State that remains. No friend of Israel wishes to see such an outcome.

Therefore, today I say to colleagues on the Security Council, time is running out. It has been eight long years since the Council adopted a draft resolution on this issue. History and the international community will not judge us well. It is time for us to ask more of each of the parties, to require that they face up to their responsibilities, and to ask more of this organ, which is charged with maintaining international peace and security.

While we welcome other efforts to bring about an improvement in this negative cycle, New Zealand believes that the Quartet remains the body best placed to harness the efforts of other parties and to report to and give advice to the Council. In that respect, we note with concern yesterday's reports that Israel's Defence Minister has placed a boycott on Special Coordinator Mladenov. That action, reportedly taken in response to the Special Coordinatior doing the job we have all asked him to do, is deeply counterproductive.

It was seriously disapponting that the recent report (S/2016/595, annex) of the Quartet was subject to such significant delays and that, when it arrived, its recommendations were not adopted as a basis for further Council engagement. That would have been a modest step forward, and the Council could not even agree on that. New Zealand intends to revisit these matters over the coming weeks as we try to find a way of ensuring that the Council becomes re-engaged in a matter that cries out for its attention.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to the other members of the Council.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Two days ago, on 13 September, we celebrated the twenty-third anniversary of what is known as the Oslo Accord between Palestinians and Israelis, by virtue of which it was agreed to temporarily manage Palestinian affairs for a period of no more than five years, as of 1993, provided that negotiations were conducted on final status issues on the basis of the two-State solution, by establishing a Palestinian State within the 4 July 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. The anniversary of that historic agreement should prompt

the international community, including the Security Council, to ask itself whether it has been able to help the Palestinian people to attain a modicum of their inalienable rights as enshrined in international law and Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. I would like to underscore that I am confident that our collective conscience recognizes unequivocally that the answer to that question does not require any research, or effort or scrutiny: the realities on the ground speak for themselves.

Today, 23 years after the Oslo Accord, instead of seeing a sovereign Palestinian State pursuant to international legitimacy, we see a pseudo-State of illegal settlements that contain at least half a million settlers. Those settlements have proliferated on Palestinian territories with official support from the Israeli occupation, which has spared no effort throughout decades to seize land, destroy houses and expel Palestinians, as well as with the support provided by the inability of the Organization and the silence of the Council, which had to surrender to the passiveness of the sole super-Power able to end this illegal invasion.

The principle of land-for-peace, which is internationally accepted, reflects the fact that the Palestinian question is actually about land. It shows that the settlements, the destruction of houses, the land seizures, the Judaization of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and the separation wall are the root cause of the disease at the core of the problem, and the main obstacle to any possible negotiations to achieve the two-State solution.

Some are wrong to think that the continuing international powerlessness in the face of those illegal and inhumane practices has become something routine that could be acceptable, or that it establishes new rights other than the right of Palestinians to their land.

Allow me to reiterate that we feel great sorrow when we see attempts to exploit that powerlessness as a pretext to promote an alternative narrative concerning the Palestinian question, or to hold Palestinian people living under siege behind walls in Gaza responsible for such powerlessness, or to push for accepting the occupation and its determination and practices aimed at altering the fait accompli on the ground. That is an excuse worse than the crime.

The delay in resolving the Palestinian question because of the lack of political will on the part of the major Powers, and the ongoing policy by the occupation to pursue the illegal settlements on the ground, must not lead us to forget the main role of the United Nations and its organs, or divert us from the path set out by international legitimacy. Perhaps it is necessary to remind everyone, in particular United Nations bodies and their representatives, that the obstacles to resolving this issue do not absolve the Organization of its responsibility and primary role as legal guarantor of the rights of the Palestinians throughout history, nor do they invalidate the relevant the Security Council and the General Assembly resolutions or the provisions of international law, without any concessions, regardless of the balance of power between the parties concerned, and without the Organization becoming a party to political arrangements that run counter the international legitimacy. Those arrangements will have no impact on the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. And that will not change regardless of the duration of this crisis, and even if those rights have been enshrined so far in the Organization's documents and international conventions.

Despite the fact this crisis has lasted for so long, and Israel continues to turn a deaf ear to the calls of the international community, we still insist on the path to peace. That has always been made clear in the Arab Peace Initiative, which confirmed that Arab States are ready to live normally side by side in peace with Israel as neighbours, if Israel accepts the basic principles of good neighbourliness and puts an end to its occupation of Arab territories by withdrawing from the lands it occupied in 1967, including the Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese territories in the south of that country.

As Council members can see, the equation is simple and does not consist of incitement, or hatred or even talk about legitimate resistance to occupation. It simply reflects the desire of Arab States to have normal relations with Israel, thus guaranteeing security and the legitimacy of its existence.

We are still waiting for an Israeli response to the Arab Peace Initiative, put forward years ago. We are still unable to understand why the Israeli Government is ignoring the Initiative despite the fact that it deals directly with Israel. That has been an obsession for Israel.

We also underscore that the assessments undertaken in an attempt to distort the Initiative are erroneous and false. The Arab peoples are too aware to accept any concessions on the rights of the Palestinian people,

or the rights of the Syrian and Lebanese peoples, to recover their occupied territories.

Egypt remains committed to the Arab Peace Initiative and continues to encourage international parties to relaunch negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis, including the efforts of France, Russia and United Nations Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov.

Egypt will remain determined to work in multilateral and bilateral formats to execute its vision for peace in the region — a vision that was launched 37 years ago when Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty. It can still be implemented, with the necessary political will and if Israel finally decides to opt for comprehensive and just peace, for itself and for the States in the region.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to start by thanking the Secretary-General for his presence here today, for his commitment and for his briefing. We would also like to pay tribute to the United Nations and the Special Coordinator, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for their work on the ground. I take this opportunity to reiterate France's full support for Mr. Mladenov.

We find ourselves, on the eve of the beginning of the ministerial segment seventy-first session of the General Assembly, at a moment where it is appropriate to take stock. The results of the past year have been indisputable. What we are seeing here is the inexorable marginalization of two-State solution, which is a solution, let us be clear, that is today at risk. Israeli settlement policy constitutes one of the main threats to the implementation of a two-State solution. By splintering Palestine's future territory, the settlement policy undermines the prospects for a Palestinian State. The settlement policy is demonstrated by the de facto annexation of Area C, the transfer of populations, impediments to movement, and the destruction of housing and humanitarian infrastructure for Palestinians. The radicalization of public opinion, acts of violence, incitements to violence and terrorism seriously undermine the prospects for seeing two States coexist — a State of Israel and a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security. Progress in terms of Palestinian reconciliation are also indispensable and urgent.

Following two years of interruption of the negotiations process, France vigorously advocates for the need for renewed international assistance for the peace process and the preservation of a two-State solution. We must act collectively to place this conflict at the very core of our priorities and extricate ourselves from the current impasse, which is an impasse that weakens the Palestinian Authority, jeopardizes security for Israelis and fuels the radicalization of public opinion throughout the region and beyond.

It is in that context that France has presented to the parties and their main partners an initiative aimed at recreating collective political mobilization in favour of the peace process. Our approach is both progressive and collective. It is progressive because all of us know that the conditions for the immediate relaunch of the negotiations are simply not in place today. It is therefore the responsibility of the international community to urge the parties to return to the negotiating table by creating around them a conducive climate coupled with a positive agenda, with a set of incentives to that end. This is the very heart of our initiative. It is a collective approach because we are attempting to tailor each stage of our initiative to existing efforts, in particular those of the Quartet and our Arab partners. Furthermore, France has always yearned to see the Security Council, when the time is right, play a key role in assisting and consolidating the negotiations process.

The ministerial conference that was held in Paris on 3 June was a decisive moment that enabled us to take a first step. The international community reaffirmed its commitment to the two-State solution and expressed its determination to engage collectively to recreate the necessary conditions for the resumption of peace negotiations. On 19 September, in New York, at the margins of the General Assembly, France will organize a working meeting at the level of high officials to take stock of work already carried out and to identify measures that should enable us to preserve the two-State solution and make progress on the conditions necessary for a resumption of the peace process. It goes without saying that we will continue to involve the parties and inform them of our work in the most transparent manner, as we have always done at all stages of the process.

If we do not act with resolve, the two-State solution will die, and it will gradually make way for a situation of fait accompli, which will never guarantee a just and lasting settlement of the conflictl; rather, it will continue to weigh upon the region's equilibrium. France will therefore spare no effort to prevent this drift and

will work to recreate a political momentum based on the two-State solution.

We will never give up. Together with all of our partners, we will continue to work unstintingly to this end.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I too wish to convey my thanks to the Secretary-General for his briefing. We are grateful to the presidency of New Zealand and to you, Foreign Minister Murray McCulley, for convening today's meeting and for your presence at the Security Council today.

Uruguay is concerned at the lack of progress in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its humanitarian, political and security consequences in both countries and the entire region. Unfortunately, in the past few months we have had no significant news with respect to the peace process. We were hoping to see a quicker pace and a greater impact following the Quartet report (S/2016/595, annex) but that has not been the case. So far, the parties have not taken any measure to reverse the trends that are threatening the two-State solution despite the helpful recommendations set out in the report.

Despite the fact that there seems to have been a gradual reduction in terrorist acts and the general level of violence, the political climate has not really changed, and we still see a paralysis when it comes to the possible renewal of direct bilateral negotiations. In Uruguay's opinion, as the Quartet's report rightly pointed out, Israel's continuing construction of settlements is a serious threat to peace. The fact that only a few days after the publication of the report, Israel announced its decision to build 560 new houses in the West Bank and 240 in East Jerusalem, without considering the report's recommendations, is a very bad sign however we look at it.

We reiterate our concerned about the protracted stalemate in the peace process between Israel and Palestine. Political signals should be sent so as to break the vicious circle of misunderstanding and violent clashes that undermine the Palestinian people's aspirations to finally live in peace after half a century of occupation and a serious humanitarian situation, particularly in Gaza, which has worsened after every armed escalation. We hope that both countries can overcome their differences and reach an understanding on the key issues that divide them. Today, almost 23 years after the Oslo Accords, at which both countries recognized each other and laid the groundwork for working towards a solution based on two independent States, we were sorry to see that the Quartet indicates a situation of continuing violence, attacks on civilians, incitements to violence and weakening trust, none of which is conducive to achieving a peaceful solution to the conflict.

The importance of taking urgent measures to reverse the current stalemate in the conflict compels us to reiterate our call to the parties to resume their contact on a basis capable of meeting the desires of both sides. That means dealing with terrorism in the Palestinian territories, ending Israel's illegal settlement of those territories, silencing incitement to violence through hate speech and striving for a genuine commitment to achieving a two-State solution through appropriate policies, such as the Quartet recommends in its latest report.

I should reiterate that seeking solutions to issues related to international peace and security is a priority for Uruguay, and we will work unceasingly to try to bring the parties together to that end. We do not ignore the continuing serious problems, but we refuse to give up hope and would like to remind everyone that more complex situations have been resolved when the requisite political will could be found, such as occurred with the Camp David accords and the Sinai agreement between Egypt and Israel. Similarly, in 1994, the State of Israel and the Kingdom of Jordan were able to arrive at a peace acceptable to both parties.

While Uruguay believes that the achievement of a lasting solution is up to the two parties to the conflict, the international community also plays a significant role in it, particularly since up to now the parties have been unable to reach an agreement on their own. It is therefore important that the international community step up its efforts to support the process and encourage the parties to resume a dialogue and sit down once again at the negotiating table, with a view to coming up with a peaceful, just, negotiated and lasting solution in accordance with international law. In that regard, we emphasize the importance of ensuring that the parties come up with a specific timetable and measures that each of them has to take in areas where the path to a solution has been blocked, such as combating terrorism, demonstrating unity within the Palestinian Government and agreeing on a process for removing the illegal settlements.

Uruguay is ready to support and collaborate on any proposal that can bring both parties back to the negotiating table and make progress with the peace process. In that regard, we commend the Arab Peace Initiative, the French initiative and any others that may emerge. Lastly, I would like to conclude by saying that, sadly, almost 70 years since the process began, and despite massive efforts, we still see no closure. The international community continues to call for a negotiated political agreement, the only way out of this endless tunnel of death and destruction. I urge the parties to listen to those calls and allow us to help them. We must not forget that the most important part of coexistence among States is peace; nor should we allow generations of young people and children to continue to grow up in mistrust, fear and hatred.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Secretary-General for his substantive statement. Despite some reduction in tensions on the ground, the Palestinian-Israeli situation remains problematic. Various incidents in the West Bank and Jerusalem, as well as the sporadic aggravation of tensions around the Gaza Strip show that the risk of an escalation in the conflict is as high as ever.

Against the background of a stalemated settlement, new initiatives aimed at finding ways to reignite the peace process are appearing. Those ideas seem reasonable and are at least aimed at achieving some genuinely essential goals. Nonetheless, in our view they should only complement the efforts being made within the framework of the established mechanism of the Middle East Quartet. Attempts to shift focus to other forums will merely divert the international community's attention from the Palestinian question. We concur with those calling for a more active involvement in the issue on the part of the Security Council, and maybe they should take a more vigorous approach to promote that idea.

On 22 September, on the margins of the general debate in the General Assembly at its seventy-first session, we will hold a ministerial meeting of the Quartet. I would once again like to draw attention to the recommendations in the report (S/2016/595, annex) of the Quartet published on 1 June. We firmly believe that if we can move forward on them we could create the conditions for reviving Palestinian-Israeli relations and a relaunch of the political process on the basis of internationally recognized agreements. In that context, we would like to emphasize the crucial significance of the Arab Peace Initiative.

The lack of unity among Palestinians is another obstacle to reviving the political process. All those who wield influence on the Palestinian side should urge them to unite without delay on the basis of the Palestinian Liberation Organization's platform and the principles of the Quartet.

The humanitarian and economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially the Gaza Strip, continues to be a serious concern. It exacerbates dissatisfaction among the population, helps to radicalize social attitudes and makes it harder to reach a negotiated solution. The violence, and the incitements to violence, must be stopped and the settlement activity must end. We believe that a durable peace, based on a two-State solution, can meet the aspirations of the Palestinians to an independent sovereign State as well as Israelis' desire for security. And it will help to normalize conditions in the region as a whole.

For our part, we pursue our efforts to overcome the negative trends in the Palestinian-Israeli situation and to channel it towards a political and diplomatic solution. We are working actively and directly with the parties to the conflict and the concerned States in the region. In our contacts in the past few weeks with President Abbas of Palestine and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel, they underlined their interest in meeting in Moscow in order to discuss the best ways to unblock the peace process without preconditions. Our activity is based on the international efforts to arrive at a reliable negotiating process between the Palestinian and Israeli sides. Needless to say, those efforts will be conducted further in close coordination with the Quartet partners and key international and regional actors.

In conclusion, I would like to affirm our support for the work of Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): On behalf of my delegation, I warmly welcome you, Sir, to the Security Council and thank you for presiding over this meeting. Malaysia appreciates New Zealand's tireless efforts to propel the Council to take urgent action on the Palestinian question. We share your view, Sir, on the crucial role of the Council in creating the necessary conditions for peace and pushing the parties to restart the dialogue process in order to salvage the two-State solution. My

delegation is also grateful to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his presence and briefing today.

My delegation decided to take the floor today in view of the worsening situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and the ongoing apathy in the Council to address the situation. In particular, we wish to highlight the expansion of settlement activities, which constitutes the biggest threat to peace and the two-State solution.

Over the years, we have heard repeated warnings from the Secretary-General and his Special Coordinator, Mr. Mladenov, about the expansion of settlement activities, which threatens to bury the two-State solution. Over the past few months alone, hundreds of Israeli settlements have continued to expand despite their undeniably illegal nature under international law, clear recommendations of the Quartet report (S/2016/595, annex) and widespread condemnations on the part of the international community. In addition, we also see attempts by the Israeli authorities to retroactively legalize outposts in another systematic attempt to change the realities on the ground.

For far too long, such activities have persisted with impunity as we continue to restrain our response to mere verbal disapproval without any effective measures to halt the illegal activities. The expansion of settlement activities and the legalization of outposts are accompanied by increasing demolitions of Palestinian homes and structures, the confiscation of Palestinian lands and increasing settler violence. In 2015, on average, four cases of settler violence against Palestinian civilians were reported per week. In one recent incident, Israeli settlers unleashed dogs to attack a Palestinian man, while, in another, Israeli settlers pumped sewage onto land belonging to Palestinian farmers, consequently damaging Palestinian-owned trees. Even young Palestinian girls have not bee spared from settlers' violence, as they have been harassed and beaten by Israeli settlers. In most cases, there is no recourse to justice.

In the case of one Palestinian family, which owns olive orchards and agricultural lands in the occupied West Bank, the members were prevented from working their land located in close proximity to an illegal Israeli settlement. Their trees and land were damaged and poisoned by the settlers. Despite complaints submitted to the Israel police 86 times, no action has been taken to hold the settlers to account or provide redress. Settler violence can no longer be treated as isolated incidents. It is clear that the settlers are becoming emboldened as a direct result of the Israeli Government's policy on settlement expansion and the impunity allowed them.

Settlement expansion occurs against a backdrop of severe restrictions on the national growth and development of Palestinian communities. We are all aware of the near-impossible prospect of obtaining permits from Israeli authorities to enable Palestinian families to expand their homes to accommodate the natural growth in Area C of the occupied West Bank. Many Palestinians have had to resort to building homes without permits, only later to face Israeli demolition orders and costly fines. Unable to pay the unjust fines, which could amount to tens of thousands of dollars, many have been forced to demolish their homes. We saw one such case just last week. As a Palestinian who had to destroy his home in East Jerusalem stated,

> "The first hammer blow feels like you are hitting yourself. It is not easy to demolish your dream".

In another incident, a Palestinian father had to demolish a room for his three small children to avoid exorbitant demolition fines issued by the Israeli municipality after spending 12 years in a failed attempt to fight the demolition order in Israeli court.

Such examples are part of a brutal and systematic attempt by Israel to break the spirit of the Palestinians and make their lives in occupied East Jerusalem unbearable, so that they will eventually leave. We agree with the Secretary-General that it is disturbing that any opposition to Israeli settlement expansion to protect the legitimate rights of Palestinians is now labelled by the Israeli leadership as ethnic cleansing. That is truly provocative, senseless and reflects nothing more than a feeble attempt to defend the indefensible — an incorrigible attitude to stay the destructive course of harvesting Palestinian despair and misery.

Clearly, doing nothing is not an option for the Security Council as the organ entrusted to maintain international peace and security. We must take urgent, effective actions to halt and reverse illegal settlement activities, which are fuelling radicalization owing to widespread frustrations and anger among occupied Palestinians. We must discourage Israel from wallowing in their repressive policies. We must not allow our plea to fall deaf ears. We must have the courage to nurse our bleeding conscience.

To maintain international attention on this issue, Malaysia, together with like-minded members of the Council, is planning to hold an Arria Formula meeting in October with a focus on the issue of settlements. Malaysia also welcomes the upcoming meeting of the Quartet in New York as a follow-up to the international ministerial conference held in Paris in June. We continue to support the French initiative, which complements the efforts of the Middle East Quartet. We look forward to concrete actions being taken by the relevant parties, backed by the international community, to recreate the much-needed political horizon for a two-State solution.

In conclusion, I reiterate Malaysia's call for the Council to use the various tools at its disposal to create the necessary conditions for peace and to influence the parties' behaviour in order to salvage the two-State solution. We stand ready to engage constructively with other Council members in that regard.

Mr. Gimolieca (Angola): We thank you, Sir, for presiding over this important meeting and for your very insightful remarks on such a troubling and sensitive issue. We also thank Secretary-General Ban-Ki-moon for his briefing and his continued commitment to a just resolution of this intractable conflict, which has been a source of frustration and despair for so many of us.

As we reach the final months of our tenure in the Security Council, it is with great regret that we note the lack of progress towards a two-State solution and the lack of unity within the Council on how to reverse the negative trends on the ground. Despite the efforts of a large majority to provide the guidance and support that Israel and Palestinians need to move towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict and a negotiated two-State solution, which envisages the coexistence of Palestine and Israel living side-by-side in peace and security, key stakeholders remain reluctant to put their weight behind those efforts.

The reluctance to enforce the decisions that have been adopted, along with the unwillingness to enforce basic respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, has not only delayed any meaningful progress but also demonstrated the importance of mechanisms such as the Middle East Quartet, whose recommendations remain largely ignored by the Government of Israel. Since the latest Quartet report (S/2016/595, annex), which offers recommendations for the way forward in the peace process, the Israeli Government has increased settlement-related activities as well as demolitions of Palestinian homes and civilian infrastructure, and demonstrated a total disregard for any international initiative to bring the parties together to negotiate a just and final settlement to the conflict.

That is not only regrettable, but also unacceptable. It has been nearly 40 years since the Security Council determined that Israeli settlements in occupied territory had no legal validity and were an obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Yet here we are today standing by and allowing thousands of units to be built in East Jerusalem and the West Bank by the Israeli Government with total impunity and disregard for our calls to reverse this trend.

As we have repeatedly stated, this deadly and destructive conflict has global repercussions, and time is running out for us to bring about a meaningful solution. That is why it is extremely important for us to present a united front and to support all multilateral efforts to create a viable political horizon so as to resolve this conflict once and for all.

As we seek to promote justice, respect for human rights, international humanitarian law and all other democratic principles around the world, we must not compromise our credibility by ignoring the plight of the Palestinian people. The members of the Security Council, the Middle East Quartet and all other stakeholders have a moral obligation to bring about an end to this illegal occupation, which has lasted nearly 50 years. It is our hope that Israel will recognize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and independence by ceasing all illegal settlement activity, as well as all oppressive policies, and participate constructively in all multilateral efforts to revive negotiations, because that is the only true path to lasting peace.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): Let me first express my gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Murray McCully, Foreign Minister of New Zealand, for having convened this meeting. My gratitude also goes to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his presence here and his thorough briefing today.

As the Secretary-General mentioned in his briefing, a variety of initiatives have been undertaken in pursuit of the two-State solution. Unfortunately, we have seen little progress. Japan expresses its strong concern over the continued violence towards civilians, terrorist attacks and incitements to violence. We also express

strong concern over the continuing policy of settlement expansion. We believe that settlement activity is a violation of international law and steadily erodes the viability of the two-State solution.

In addition, the continued violence is fundamentally incompatible with a peaceful solution. The international community must take action to address the dire humanitarian situation and recovery needs of the people of Gaza and to encourage the resumption of meaningful negotiations.

Given the difficulty of the current situation on the ground, creating an environment conducive to a two-State solution may seem like a roundabout approach. However, I would like to make note of the fifth ministerial-level meeting of the Four-Party Consultative Unit for the Corridor for Peace and Security initiative, which was held in Jericho, West Bank, on 7 September. It was hosted by Japan, with ministerial-level participation on the part of Israel, Jordan and Palestine. Through job creation, this initiative seeks to support a sustainable economy in Palestine, which underpins the viability of a two-State solution. At first glance, this project to create a conducive environment may not seem like a short route to a two-State solution. However, the cooperation of the four parties through this initiative has lasted for 10 years, regardless of the highs and lows of the political situation, and it plays a meaningful role in rebuilding trust between the two parties through economic and social development. Japan continues to be committed to peace and prosperity in the region.

I would like to briefly discuss the situation in Syria as well. Japan welcomes the agreement reached on 9 September between Secretary Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov, which has resulted in a nationwide cessation of hostilities since 12 September. Even more importantly, the degree of violence has decreased markedly since the conclusion of this agreement. The reduction in violence allows for the expansion of humanitarian access, gives hope to Syria's people and increases the prospect of the resumption of the political process.

Let us recall that the cessation of hostilities, confirmed by resolution 2268 (2016) in February, was observed fairly faithfully for two months. In the following months, however, we witnessed a string of breathtakingly tragic events. We must prevent a relapse. Japan is committed to playing its role as a member of the Council and the International Syria Support Group to promote the stability and recovery of Syria.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, I should like to start by commending your initiative of holding this meeting, which provides us with an opportunity to once again exchange views on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I wish to convey my gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his comprehensive briefing, which clearly underscored the links between the impasse in the political process, the unacceptable continuation of the settlement policy and related activities, and the very difficult humanitarian situation, especially in Gaza.

Less than a month after our last meeting on the issue (see S/PV.7757), we are gathered here yet again to discuss the very difficult situation prevailing in the occupied Palestinian territories. We note that, unfortunately, the settlement policy and related activities are continuing and intensifying, rendering increasingly uncertain the prospects for a two-State solution.

According to the United Nations, in the month of August 2016 alone, Israeli security services either destroyed or confiscated 85 civilian structures throughout 28 communities in the West Bank. In total, more than 786 housing units and structures have been destroyed in the West Bank in 2016 alone, leading to the displacement of 1,197 people, including 558 children. More than 200 of the structures destroyed had been used for humanitarian purposes.

Then we have the destruction of the water-supply system, which was built with UNICEF in the Jordan River Valley, which impacts about 1,000 Palestinians throughout five Bedouin communities that have particularly erratic access to water, especially in summer. In addition, communities including Daqiqa, Khan Al-Ahmar, Umm Al-Khair, Abu Nuwar and Susya, to list but a few, host very vulnerable Palestinian communities, where families, which consist mainly of displaced persons, live in constant fear of finding themselves shelterless from one day to the next.

That is why my delegation denounces once again the continuing and increasing demolition and confiscation of Palestinian houses and structures, and urges the Israeli Government to put an end to the forced transfer of populations and to the physical and administrative restrictions they have imposed, which exacerbate tensions between the two communities.

Palestinian children continue to pay a very heavy price in this conflict. Thousands have lost their lives, including 535 during the military assault on the Gaza Strip in 2014. Their suffering is compounded by administrative detention, the disproportionate use of force and extrajudicial assassinations that, in addition to constituting violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, do nothing but stoke hatred and violence. I express my delegation's deep concerns over the critical situation of three young Palestinians: the brothers Muhammad and Mahmoud Balboul — a dentist and army officer, respectively — and the journalism student Malik Al-Qadi, who has been on hunger strike for almost two months.

The catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza — a small enclave of some 36,000 square kilometres that has been besieged for over nine years, and where 1.3 million of its 2 million inhabitants require assistance — should weigh on our collective conscience. Following the conflict two years ago, three-quarters of Gaza's homes are in need of repair as a result of the failure to honour commitments amounting to $3.5 billion undertaken in the framework of the Cairo donors conference of 2014. I therefore take this opportunity to welcome the activities of humanitarian players, including United Nations agencies, to mitigate the daily impact of the conflict on children by enhancing their psychosocial well-being, improving the supply of such basic services as water, rebuilding schools and catching up on the education of students who have fallen behind. Given these circumstances, my delegation reiterates its call for international protection for the Palestinian people, who have been under occupation for nearly 50 years, and reaffirms its support for the initiative to make 2017 the year that marks the end of the occupation.

Extreme poverty, a high level of unemployment and the total lack of development prospects are scourges that could promote the emergence of a new conflict. The Quartet has drawn attention to that danger in its report (S/2016/595, annex), which reveals that only 5 per cent of Gaza's water is potable and that access to electricity is scarce. In that regard, the report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development is unambiguous. It tells us that the rate of growth of the Palestinian economy could easily double if there were no occupation, leading to a virtuous cycle of reduced unemployment and poverty and offering the Palestinian people conditions conducive to a better social and economic life. We therefore echo the Quartet's appeal to the Israeli Government to implement previous agreements and transfer competencies to the Palestinian Authority, especially in Area C, so as to promote long-awaited progress in housing, access to water and energy, communications, agriculture and natural resources.

As the occupying Power, and in compliance with its commitment to the two-State solution, Israel will have to end all settlement and related activities and launch sincere negotiations according to a pre-established time table with explicit goals, leading to a lasting peace that meets both its own security needs and the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to a sovereignty State on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

I cannot conclude my statement without voicing our hope that, despite the delays, local elections will be held throughout the Palestinian territories and open the way to reconciliation among the political stakeholders, leading to the formation of a Government of national unity on the basis of the Cairo agreement. We reaffirm our conviction that influential countries of the region and the Security Council have a crucial role to play in the optimal management ofthe peace process. Similarly, we reiterate our support for the Paris conference as a contribution to the solution to the conflict based on existing platforms, such as the Arab Peace Initiative, leading to the establishment of two States of Israel and Palestine within the pre-1967 borders.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing and Foreign Minister McCully for presiding over this meeting.

Allow me also, on behalf of the United States, to wish former Israeli President Shimon Peres a speedy recovery. I last had the chance to meet President Peres at his office in Israel in February, and greatly admire his ongoing work to promote peace and closer ties between Israelis and Palestinians.

The United States shares the Secretary-General's views about rising tensions on ground, and we continue to condemn all terrorist attacks. All sides must exercise restraint and refrain from provocative actions and rhetoric. In the Golan Heights, we are alarmed by the increasing number of rockets and shells fired from Syria, as well as rockets launched from Gaza. In addition, there have been recent reports of incitement on social media, including on accounts allegedly linked to Fatah.

We are also deeply concerned about allegations of the use of excessive force by Israeli security forces against Palestinian civilians. This includes the killing and wounding of two Palestinian men inside their car in the Shuafat refugee camp near East Jerusalem on 5 September. The Israeli Ministry of Justice has opened an investigation, and we look forward to seeing the full results. At the same time, we remain deeply concerned about attacks on the Israel Defense Forces, including the stabbing of an Israeli soldier near Jenin on 24 August.

The international community can make a tangible investment in that region's stability. Both reconstruction efforts in Gaza and programmes run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are facing critical funding shortfalls. For Gaza, out of $3.5 billion pledged for reconstruction at the 2014 Cairo conference, just $1.6 billion have been disbursed so far.

Even with limited funding, there has been some progress. Fifty per cent of damaged homes have been repaired and more than 30 per cent of fully destroyed homes have been rebuilt. But Gaza needs more support. For an economy with 41 per cent unemployment, further disbursements of aid to Gaza will have a significant impact. The UNRWA financial shortfall of $74 million could leave more than 500,000 students out of school and 30,000 employees without paychecks next month. A suspension of UNRWA core services could further destabilize an already volatile region. The United States has contributed an additional $12 million to fund UNRWA, bringing our total this year to nearly $329 million. Sweden and Switzerland have also stepped up with new contributions and pledges. We urge other Governments to join this effort to avert a potential humanitarian crisis, which would have long-term effects.

The United States strongly opposes continued Israeli settlement activity, which is corrosive to the cause of peace. As we have said repeatedly, such actions are not consistent with Israel's stated desire to achieve a two-State solution. We share the deep concern expressed by the Secretary-General and other Council members about reports in July that the Israeli Government published tenders for hundreds of settlement units in East Jerusalem and advanced other settlement plans. We also share concerns regarding the Israeli Government's attempts to retroactively legalize outposts that are illegal under Israeli law. Most recently, Ministry of Justice officials questioned the 1 September order from the High Court of Justice to demolish 17 houses in the Netiv Ha'avot settlement outpost within 18 months. The Court determined that these settlements were built on private Palestinian lands. There are also reports that the Israeli Government has begun the process to take over or lease land privately owned by Palestinians so as to relocate the illegal Amona outpost, as well as to consider building homes for Israeli settlers in a military compound in Hebron.

These cases represent unprecedented and troubling steps that are inconsistent with prior Israeli legal opinions. The cases also run counter to longstanding Israeli official policy not to seize privately owned land or use land originally seized for military purposes for settlements. The situation in Susiya, which remains under threat of demolition, is also troubling. If the Israeli Government proceeds with demolitions,it would have a very damaging impact on the lives of the area's Palestinian inhabitants, who were already displaced on other, previous occasions.

Those actions appear to be the latest examples of a steady acceleration of settlement activity and demolitions, which is systematically undermining prospects for a two-State solution. Those concerns were addressed specifically in the Quartet report (S/2016/595, annex), and have been raised repeatedly by the other Quartet members and the international community. We call on the parties to take significant steps urgently to stabilize the situation and to reverse current trends. We will continue to urge both sides to demonstrate, through policies and actions, a genuine commitment to preserving prospects for the two-State solution. As a member of the Quartet, the United States co-authored the Quartet report, and we stand behind its recommendations in their entirety. Furthermore, we support the efforts of Special Coordinator Mladenov and his team, who continue to work tirelessly to promote peace and to keep us apprised of developments on issues that reflect the concerns of all members of the Security Council.

Turning to Syria, as all members are aware, after months of negotiations, the United States and Russia reached an agreement on a series of steps aimed at reducing the violence and alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people. The goal is also to create an environment conducive to negotiations on a political transition for Syria, which is the only way to end this horrific conflict. That agreement is not one based on trust and promises. It is an agreement based on

reciprocal actions, halting attacks and allowing for deliveries of assistance. We therefore look to Russia to deliver on its commitment to use its leverage to stop the Al-Assad regime from employing the barbaric tactics it has long used in the conflict. That means a halt to the barrel bombs, a halt to the chemical-weapon attacks, a halt to indiscriminate assaults on civilian areas and a halt to the starve-get-bombed-or-surrender tactics that have characterized the Al-Assad regime's approach to conflict.

The plan starts with a nationwide cessation of hostilities that excludes Jabhat Al-Nusra and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). We urge all parties, regime and opposition, to adhere to the cessation of hostilities by stopping aerial bombardments and stopping attempts to take new territory. So far, early reports indicate that violence has decreased significantly, which is encouraging. But violence has not completely stopped. Progress towards a political solution will depend upon all parties adhering to the cessation of hostilities and all relevant Governments using their influence to promote sustained calm.

I want to stress that the cessation of hostilities is only one part of the agreement. Humanitarian assistance also needs to flow. That ought to be straightforward, but the Al-Assad regime has employed every possible tactic to disrupt aid deliveries. Those include the regime removing medical supplies from convoys and withholding approvals for the United Nations to reach certain areas. As we all know, the consequences are direct and immediate. Blocking aid kills people. Those tactics have to stop. United Nations convoys have to be able to reach the nearly 600,000 Syrians living in besieged areas, where people are almost entirely dependent upon aid deliveries to survive — not in a few weeks or months. The convoys need to roll today. That means Damascus must grant swift, final approvals and provide facilitation letters for assistance to reach all besieged and hard-to-reach locations. It also means that the opposition must provide assurances that assistance will not be impeded in the areas that it controls.

Only after we have seen improved humanitarian access and a sustained period of reduced violence will the United States and Russia take steps to establish a joint centre to facilitate the targeting of Jabhat Al-Nusra, Al-Qaida's affiliate in Syria, and ISIL. Those are terrorist groups that pose a direct threat to our collective security and whose toxic ideologies are incompatible with the moderate opposition and the aspirations of the Syrian people. Any party to the conflict that seeks to maintain its legitimacy should distance itself in every way possible from terrorist organizations. Targeting Jabhat Al-Nusra and ISIL, however, cannot be a pretext for the Al-Assad regime's indiscriminate attacks and besiegement tactics, which only increase the suffering of innocents and generates new recruits for these violent extremist groups.

That is why the United States insisted in our negotiation with Russia that two things had to happen in parallel if we are to achieve our goals. We all must intensify our actions against terrorists, and Russia must ensure that Al-Assad's forces are no longer in bombing in any opposition or Al-Nusra areas — meaning that the regime would no longer be able to use the excuse that it is targeting Al-Nusra in order to go after its own people. To stress: if and when the joint centre is stood up and sets into motion action against terrorist targets, Al-Assad's military aircraft must simultaneously stop flying any combat missions over eastern Aleppo, the Damascus suburbs, Latakia, Idlib, Dar'a and any other areas where opposition forces or Jabhat Al-Nusra are present. It is noteworthy and important that Russia agreed to that, as well as to the role of the joint centre in monitoring the Syrian regime's compliance. That contributed significantly to our pursuit of the deal.

Yet we are clear-eyed about the many challenges still to be tackled before we can reach that phase of the deal. And many new challenges will arise to implement it successfully, given the regime's track record of breaking its commitments and flouting its obligations, including obligations determined by the Security Council. If all parties live up to their obligations, we have a chance — a chance to make progress towards a political solution.

A civil defence volunteer in eastern Aleppo, Mohammed Omar, told a reporter that, for the first time in far too long,

> "people are going about their business and children are even playing in the street".

Children playing outside should not be an aberration, should not be worthy of comment in the Council. All of us must do everything possible to ensure that this relative calm can be sustained.

Mr. Arcia Vivas (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the New Zealand presidency for the convening of today's meeting today, and we thank

Foreign Minister Murray McCully for presiding over it. New Zealand's effective leadership of the Security Council and its willingness to address the initiatives and proposals made in this organ are recognized and welcomed by our delegation. We also welcome the briefing by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, which is a clear illustration of his interest and the importance he attaches to the issue, as well as of his commitment so that the United Nations, with the support of the United Nations, can help find peace and stability in the region.

We reiterate our support for Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov.

The situation in the Middle East continues to give rise to concerns, given the various pressing, diverse and complicated situations in that tumultuous part of the world. In that regard, we will focus our statement on the Palestinian question, which is at the heart, or has significant impact on, the recent problems and the tensions in the region.

We continue to see, with disappointment and indignation, how the intransigent attitude and heinous practices of the Israeli occupying Power against the Palestinian people in the occupied territories and against others who suffer from the unjust blockade of the Gaza Strip. We are deeply concerned at seeing how the two-State solution — the most appropriate and broadly recognized to ensure the existence of a free and sovereign Palestinian State living in peace alongside Israel — appears to be fading further away each day with the actions of the occupying Power against international law, respect for peoples and the very norms of coexistence and understanding between communities and peoples.

The lives of Palestinians are being threatened by the illegal, provocative and violent acts committed by Israeli authorities and settlers against a defenceless population. Palestinian living conditions have deteriorated significantly as a result of this reprehensible occupation, leading to a critical humanitarian situation. The geographic continuity, the political and administrative divisions, the demographic composition, historical rights and the cultural and religious fabric of Palestinian communities and land in the West Bank and East Jerusalem have been significantly altered in favour of the occupying Power, thereby imperilling the viability of an independent Palestinian State.

All of us are aware that one of the main impediments to dialogue and peace between Israelis and Palestinians, as well as one of the greatest threats to the two-State solution and the very existence of Palestine, is the immoral settlement policy of the Israeli occupying Power, which, arbitrarily and with full impunity, has moved forward with establishing and expanding settlements on Palestinian territory, using force or legal and administrative subterfuge to take land from the Palestinians and destroy their homes, infrastructure and property to set up hundreds of illegal settlements, mostly inhabited by extremist Israeli settlers, who add to the tragedy of the confiscation of property that legitimately belongs to Palestinians the worry rooted in the acts of harassment, assault and violence against displaced Palestinians, who stand up and fight back in dignity to assert their right over their land.

Some 684 housing units have been demolished in the West Bank in 2016, and so far this year we have seen a 25 per cent increase in demolitions of Palestinian homes. Some of the demolitions have been punitive, others have been due to the lack of building permits. Sometimes they have been done in order for illegal settlements to be built, in violation of international humanitarian law and the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention. This represents a break with the two-State solution concept and remorselessly affects the viability of a free Palestine and its existence as an equal State among the other nations of the Middle East.

In this atmosphere of tension and injustice, Palestinians are living under the surveillance and harassment of the Israeli military and security forces which impedes the free movement of Palestinians. Still worse, we are seeing adult men and women and young Palestinians falling victim to indiscriminate and disproportionate violence at the hands of the occupying Power's military and security forces and hotheaded settlers. They have been killed, injured, indefinitely detained and imprisoned. They are the victims of collective punishment due to real or alleged attacks that could have been perpetrated by a single Palestinian or a group of Palestinians against an Israeli or a group of Israelis, which are acts that we have the obligation to reject and condemn.

Entire Palestinian towns and communities are at the mercy of the indiscriminate and criminal repression of the occupying Power, whose actions have led to the death of 218 Palestinians since October 2015. More than 17,000 Palestinians have been wounded by live ammunition — rubber bullets — or felled by tear gas. In addition, more than 7,000 Palestinians, including more

than 500 minors, are languishing in Israeli prisons, and more than 700 people are being held in administrative detention. The harassment, violence and oppression exercised against the Palestinian people are part of the Israeli strategy to deprive them of their ancestral lands and bring about the end of the idea of having their own State. We therefore reject this erroneous and prejudicial approach by Israel in its way of addressing the question of Palestine.

We must draw attention to the critical humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories as a result of the Israeli occupation. The vast majority of Palestinian communities in Area C of the West Bank are facing serious difficulties in gaining access to distribution networks of drinking water, due to the lack or destruction of that infrastructure or because the Israeli authorities or the water companies themselves have decided to restrict the pumping of water. Access to the education for Palestinian children and young people is affected by Israeli action, including the detention of minors, military operations, incidents with settlers, restrictions on school construction, and restrictions on movement occasioned by the checkpoints.

It has been extremely difficult for Palestinians health systems in the West Bank to meet the needs of the population because of the occupation, restricted access and the lack of medical equipment. The Palestinians subjected to the unjust and brutal blockade of the Gaza Strip are in a similar or worse humanitarian situation. Nearly 2 million have seen their homes destroyed, with little or no possibility of their being rebuilt, which is also the case with hospitals, schools, workplaces, property or service facilities. Beyond the closure of border-crossing points and severe limitations on entry and exit to and from the Gaza Strip, there is the terrible legacy of explosive remnants of war, which continue to pose a threat to civilians, as does shelling from the Israeli side, motivated or not by attacks from some quarters in Gaza, resulting in the people of Gaza being subject to collective and undeserved punishment. We welcome the progress made by the Gaza reconstruction mechanism, but this progress should not make us forget that the reason for the dire situation remains the blockade.

We call on the United Nations to extend and step up efforts to address this situation and support the Palestinian people during this humanitarian crisis. In addition to the direct action and the contribution of United Nations agencies, it is appropriate and necessary for the Security Council to continuously monitor the humanitarian issue in the occupied territories and the Gaza Strip, which is just as important as the Council's dedication to the political negotiations aspects it focuses on. We would encourage Council members of the Council to ensure that humanitarian aspects are included in its discussions in order to safeguard the welfare of the Palestinians.

Given this bleak picture, the call for the occupying Power to cease its aggressive, destructive and colonial policies and bring to justice those responsible for massacres and undignified acts against Palestinians is all the more necessary. We call for an end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and an end to the blockade of the Gaza Strip. In all the decades of their occupation of Palestinian territories, the Israelis have done nothing but promote inequality, injustice and impunity, which is a breeding ground for despair and the rebellion of the Palestinians against the unjust situation in which they find themselves.

The Security Council must cease its inaction, stand firm in defence of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, make concrete efforts to bring the parties to the negotiating table and decisively support a political approach that will lead to a dialogue and negotiation. From our critical position against the intransigence and abusiveness of the occupying Power that seems to be doing everything possible not to achieve peace, we regard with optimism any act that would facilitate Palestinian-Israeli rapprochement, such as the recent steps taken to improve the electricity situation.

We support the work of the Middle East Quartet and we welcome all efforts by the international community aimed at advancing political processes and talks with Israeli and Palestinian with a view to achieving peace. That should become the exclusive basis for the two-State solution, taking into account the Arab Peace Initiative and the right of Palestinians to live in their own State within internationally recognized borders based on the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the United Nations Charter and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I join others in welcoming today's meeting and the briefing from the Secretary-General.

Since the Quartet's report (S/2016/595, annex) issued in July, we have seen a worrying acceleration of some Israeli policies in the West Bank that are, as the report makes clear, eroding the viability of the two-State solution. Far from stopping settlement expansion, as the Quartet recommended, we have seen Israel push forward plans for over 1,500 settlement units as well as the continued demolition of Palestinian structures. The numbers speak for themselves — over 800 structures destroyed this year, over a thousand people displaced, including over 500 children. As the United Kingdom Minister for the Middle East and Africa, Tobias Ellwood, made clear earlier this month, these policies fundamentally call into question Israel's commitment to the two-State solution.

The demolition orders issued against the Palestinian village of Sussia and Khan Al-Ahmar school in the east of Jerusalem are particularly concerning. Such steps would have a terrible human impact on the inhabitants of Sussia and the children of Khan Al-Ahmar. What hope is there for the two-State solution when communities are simply removed from the map and when futures are literally bulldozed to the ground? So once again I hope we can all urge Israel to cease its systematic policy of settlement expansion, demolition of Palestinian structures and limits on Palestinian development.

The Quartet report also set out the damaging effect of incitement and violence. We deplore incitement on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including any comments that could stir up hatred and prejudice.

Although levels of violence have dropped in recent months, we continue to call on the parties to do all they can to de-escalate tensions and prevent incitement. We also continue to support the revival of the Trilateral Commission on Incitement to address all allegations of incitement on both sides.

Turning to Gaza, we remain extremely worried about the ongoing dire situation there. It is estimated that 90 per cent of Gaza's water is not fit for consumption or even for agricultural use. Gaza continues to have the highest unemployment in the world. And the risk of a return to conflict hangs heavy over Gaza, as shown by the rocket attacks and Israeli response last month. Militant groups in Gaza must permanently cease rocket fire and other attacks against Israel.

The United Kingdom welcomes the steps taken by the Palestinian Authority and Israel to improve the energy, gas, electricity and water situation in Gaza. These are significant advances that will improve conditions on the ground, and it is critical that these measures are implemented quickly, given the severity of the situation. We are also encouraged that education and health facilities have largely been rebuilt, even though reconstruction is far from complete. Efforts now need to focus on completing house-building and reviving the productive sectors, stimulating exports and creating jobs.

We too have a role to play. Donors must honour all commitments that are still outstanding from the Cairo conference. The United Kingdom remains committed to doing so and to reaching those in need. I would like to once again thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and reaffirm our full and continued support for the work of Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process. We look forward to hearing from him in our closed consultations later this morning.

Since this is an open meeting, before I conclude I would like to take this opportunity to publicly welcome the announcement on Friday by the United States and Russia that they would be renewing the cessation of hostilities in Syria. That is a long-awaited positive step. The level of violence has dropped in recent days, and I hope that will continue and bring with it full humanitarian access and, eventually, an environment that will enable talks to resume between the parties.

But we have been here before. In the past, the violence has lessened only to rise to new levels of barbarity. We cannot afford to repeat history. So let us all urge the parties to honour their commitments, and let us specifically call on Russia to use its influence to restrain Al-Assad. That will be no simple feat. Earlier this week, Al-Assad said that it was his objective to regain the entire country by force, something that he is unable to do alone and that would only prolong the conflict for many years to come. For the sake of the hundreds of thousands of Syrians killed in the conflict, for the millions upon millions displaced, that simply cannot come to pass.

Mr. González de Linares Palou (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to ask you, Mr. President, to convey to Foreign Minister McCully how pleased we were to see him presiding over the Security Council, and also to congratulate you and your team on your excellent stewardship of the Council this month. I would also like to put on record — and this seems to be a trend, whereby we see briefings turn into genuine

debates — that we agree that we need to change the traditional format that we use to deal with this or any other issue on the Council's agenda. We believe it warrants a collective decision by the Council and probably the devotion of a meeting and consultations to our methods of work.

That said, I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing. We believe that it is crucial that we defend the viability of a two-State solution to the Palestinian question and, as Mr. McCully said, we have no time to waste. There is a very real danger that such a solution may soon be out of reach altogether. It is very worrying to see the destruction of Palestinian homes, the expansion of settlements and the serious humanitarian situation, which is not in Gaza alone. The stagnation in the peace process, which has lasted so long, continues to undermine trust between the parties. it is vital that we begin to create the possibility of the prospect of peace if we are to resolve the conflict before it is too late.

We are all familiar with the main causes of the breakdown in the peace process — the settlements policy and the use of violence — and we condemn the violence, acts of terror and incitement to violence regardless of their origin. Nor can we overlook the importance of solving the intra-Palestinian rivalries if we are to deal with the stagnated peace process. Spain would like to emphasize its full support for the French initiative for convening an international conference that would enable us to relaunch the peace process. My country is already participating actively in the preparatory work for it; for example, we just took part in a meeting held in Stockholm of a working group on civil society.

It is essential that measures be taken to restore trust, and we are pleased to see that some small steps have been taken in that direction, such as the agreement announced just two days ago, on 13 September, between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the repayment of electricity costs. It is a small step, but one in the right direction. Similarly, the international community must take advantage of synergies between the various initiatives — the proposals of the Quartet, the French initiative and the Arab Peace Initiative. As the Secretary-General rightly pointed out, the general debate in the General Assembly begins next week, during which a meeting of the Quartet will be held, after a preparatory meeting in Paris, as well as a meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee. We hope that all of these events and meetings will help to encourage the parties to return to the negotiating table.

Mr. Shen Bo (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing. We appreciate his active efforts to move the process forward, as well as those of Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Personal Representative of the Secretary-General. The conflict between Palestine and Israel is at the core of Middle Eastern issues and is naturally of fundamental importance to peace in the Middle East as a whole. The international community should have a great sense of urgency in terms of promoting peace negotiations and take more substantive actions.

The international community has recently come up with a series of new approaches aimed at settling the question of Palestine. In early June, the ministerial conference held in Paris in support of the Middle East peace initiative reached a preliminary consensus on how to promote the next phase of peace talks, and that has prompted the international community to refocus on the issue. We commend and support France's efforts to promote negotiations and peace. In the meantime, Russia and Egypt have also been working actively on the issue, and the Middle East Quartet has published a new report (S/2016/595, annex). China supports every effort that may help to ease the Palestinian-Israeli situation and to arrive at a two-State solution.

Right now, the top priority is breaking the impasse in which the peace talks are mired in order to work to establish an independent sovereign Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. That is an inalienable right of the Palestinian people. Both countries should exercise restraint, refrain from violent conflict, introduce initiatives that help to foster mutual trust, meet each other halfway and strive to resume talks as soon as possible and arrive at outcomes based on those talks. Israel should demonstrate goodwill by acting first to stop its expansion of settlements immediately, lift the blockade of the Gaza Strip and remove restrictions on aid to Palestinians. At the same time, Israel's legitimate security concerns should be respected.

The international community should increase its coordination in order to translate the current positive momentum towards settling the Palestine question into concrete action. We should stay focused on the central goal of all its efforts, a two-State solution, and work diligently to achieve a resumption of the peace talks,

with a view to achieving real results. We should draw on the experience gained through dealing with other hotspot issues in the Middle East by exploring every possible pathway to resuming talks under the auspices of the Middle East Quartet by creating international synergies. While we should continue to use the mechanisms that are already in place, we should also encourage new initiatives. Meanwhile, we should be mindful of the leading role of the United Nations in this issue, and any outcomes of the efforts to promote peace should be approved by the Security Council.

China has always been supportive of the Palestinian people's just aspirations to the restoration of their legitimate national rights and interests and has worked to promote peace negotiations. As a permanent member of the Security Council and a responsible major Power, we have contributed constructively to the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. Earlier this year, President Xi Jinping of China delivered a speech at the headquarters of the League of Arab States in which he specifically discussed China's principled stance on the question of Palestine. He called for relaunching peace talks at the political level and promoting economic reconstruction. At the Paris ministerial conference, China's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi, put forward the "three stops" and "three explorations" initiative. China has also been assisting Palestine, to the best of its ability, to help it revitalize its economy and improve the livelihoods of its people. China is ready to work with the international community to continue the push for an early, just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting under this format, which is in line with our recent collective discussion on how to modernize some of the working methods of the Security Council.

Ukraine consistently supports the Middle East peace process and the principle of a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine coexisting in peace and security. We are deeply concerned about the ongoing escalation we are witnessing, not only in the rhetoric of high-level officials on both sides but on the ground as well.

The shooting of a Palestinian man inside a refugee camp in East Jerusalem on 5 September, as well as the exchange of allegations of ethnic cleansing by the leaders of the two sides on 9 September, does not serve the purpose of resuming Israeli-Palestinian talks in good faith. These facts do not contribute to restoring the atmosphere of trust between the two sides, so-needed in the light of the prospect for possible talks between Netanyahu and Abbas — in Moscow, Luxembourg or elsewhere.

The recent escalation serves as yet another reminder that the status quo is a road to nowhere. We strongly believe that both sides must demonstrate genuine restraint and refrain from the use of force, which will only fuel the violence and lead to increased casualties — all of which could play into the hands of extremists who are trying to undermine the fragile prospects for peace.

No one can reasonably argue that tackling this challenge is possible without addressing its root causes, as the unresolved status of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ranks high on the terrorist agenda in the region of the Middle East and North Africa.

The decision announced to suspend the Palestinian municipal elections scheduled to take place on 8 October is regrettable, as we believe that intra-Palestinian reconciliation is an important precondition for reaching a viable agreement with Israel.

We are convinced that the establishment of a stable, peaceful and democratic Palestinian State is in Israel's long-term security interests. However, the ongoing process of settlement expansion and the legalization of outposts could undermine the efforts of the international community to achieve tangible progress in the peace process.

Ultimate success depends upon a genuine commitment by all interested parties. Diplomatic efforts must be redoubled to contain and de-escalate the latest wave of violence and to unblock Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Ukraine remains steadfast in its support of any effort to restore the hope that a two-State solution can be achieved through negotiations.

The President: I now Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7773

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7773rd meeting

Wednesday, 21 September 2016, 9 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Key	(New Zealand)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Domingos Augusto
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Ayrault
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Malaysia	Mr. Hamidi
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. García Margallo
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Johnson
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Nin Novoa
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

Identical letters dated 19 January 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2016/53)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council. Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

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The meeting was called to order at 9.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Identical letters dated 19 January 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2016/53)

The President: I wish to warmly welcome the Heads of State and Government, the Secretary-General, Ministers and other representatives present in the Security Council Chamber. Their presence today underscores the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Colombia to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, President of the Republic of Colombia, and request the Protocol Officer to escort him to his seat at the Council table.

Mr. Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, President of the Republic of Colombia, was escorted to a seat at the Council table.

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: It is a pleasure to welcome President Santos Calderón to the Chamber today and to share the good news he brings. After more than four years of arduous negotiations with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army, a Final Peace Agreement is finally at hand. I salute President Santos Calderón's vision, courage and leadership in ending through negotiations a conflict that has caused so much suffering for the Colombian people for so many decades. This great achievement is the work of Colombians — the parties and the many organizations and individuals who contributed to the negotiations.

The international community has been privileged to support their efforts. I would like to recognize in particular the contributions of Cuba and Norway, the guarantors, along with Chile and Venezuela, the accompanying nations. The United Nations has been entrusted with important responsibilities, in particular in the monitoring and verification of the ceasefire and the laying down of arms. I commend the Security Council for its unanimous, timely and effective action in responding to Colombia's request for assistance. When the parties asked for this support in January, there was still no ceasefire, much less a final agreement. Yet the Council did not hesitate. They believed in the Colombian peace process and you acted.

We are now well advanced in the deployment of the United Nations Mission in Colombia. Some 200 unarmed observers and civilian staff are on the ground, deploying to the zones where they will carry out their verification, working with the parties and engaging with communities and local authorities. Their numbers will grow quickly as the next stages of the peace process are completed. Their presence aims to help ensure that crucial commitments will be kept and to build confidence in the peace process.

I thank the Council for its latest resolution 2307 (2016), authorizing the recommendations contained in my report (S/2016/729) regarding the mandate, size and logistical requirements for the Mission. I assure members that the Mission will work in a coordinated fashion alongside the existing United Nations system in Colombia. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes have been supporting peacebuilding in Colombia for many years. They are gearing up to provide all possible support for the implementation of the agreements, including by continuing their important work on promoting human rights, implementing development programmes and providing humanitarian assistance.

I commend President Santos Calderón once again for his vision and determination. It will be an honour to attend the signing ceremony in Cartagena on Monday. These comprehensive agreements offer Colombians not only the end of a conflict, but the prospect of lasting peace rooted in more equitable development, a fully inclusive democracy and redress for millions of victims. At a time of armed conflict in many other places, peace in Colombia sends a powerful message of hope to the world.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to President Santos Calderón.

President Santos Calderón (*spoke in Spanish*): I have come before the Security Council first and foremost to thank all of its members for the support extended to my country and Government in establishing peace. I am also here to report the outcome of almost six years of negotiations — two years in secret and four in open talks — that is the result of a great effort to end the last armed conflict in the western hemisphere, which lasted 52 years and inflicted all sorts of suffering and pain on my country.

The Final Peace Agreement is sui generis, because this may be the first time ever that two parties have reached an accord to establish a special peace jurisdiction and court and submit themselves to its authority. This is the first time that the victims have been placed at the centre of the solution to a conflict, along with their rights to truth, justice, reparations and non-recurrence. This is also the first peace agreement that has a special chapter on gender, ensuring that women enjoy the same rights as men. We stress that particular aspect.

I bring the thanks of 50 million Colombians, and above all the 8 million victims among them, for the support offered by all members of the Security Council to our work, which represents a contribution to world peace.

The President: I now invite President Santos Calderón to present the Final Peace Agreement to the President of the Security Council.

President Santos Calderón presented the Final Peace Agreement to the President of the Security Council.

The President: I extend to President Santos Calderón and his Government, as well as to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army, the Council's warmest congratulations on having concluded the Final Peace Agreement. The Agreement offers the promise of a new reality of security and prosperity for all Colombians.

The meeting rose at 9.20 a.m.